This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.

+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.

+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.

+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at `http://books.google.com/`

BODLEIAN LIBRARY
The gift of
Miss Emma E. I. Dunston

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Dunston B 2078
Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Fred W Dunston
Sept 1873

CAXTONIANA:

A SERIES OF ESSAYS

ON

LIFE, LITERATURE, AND MANNERS.

BY

SIR E. BULWER LYTTON, BART.

AUTHOR OF "THE CAXTONS," ETC.

COPYRIGHT EDITION.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LEIPZIG

BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1864.

The Right of Translation is reserved.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

TO

HEINRICH ERNST.

MY DEAR ERNST,

Accept the Dedication of these Essays. You will recognise, in some of them, subjects on which I have, not unfrequently, conversed with you and the charming critic who so worthily bears your distinguished name.

The friendship I have formed with natures so noble as hers and your own, has added a new charm to my life; and all who have the privilege to know you will comprehend the affectionate pride with which I inscribe to that friendship this grateful memorial.

E. B. L.

KNEBWORTH, *October 1863.*

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

CONTENTS

OF VOLUME I.

		Page
ESSAY I.	On the Increased Attention to Outward Nature in the Decline of Life	1
— II.	On the Differences between the Urban and Rural Temperament	9
— III.	On Monotony in Occupation as a Source of Happiness	29
— IV.	On the Normal Clairvoyance of the Imagination	35
— V.	On Intellectual Conduct as Distinct from Moral: the "Superior Man"	51
— VI.	On Shyness	61
— VII.	On the Management of Money (Addressed Chiefly to the Young)	79
— VIII.	On Rhythm in Prose, as conducive to Precision and Clearness	107
— IX.	On Style and Diction	113
— X.	Hints on Mental Culture	141
— XI.	On the Moral Effect of Writers	161
— XII.	On the Distinction between Active Thought and Reverie	183
— XIII.	On the Spirit in which New Theories should be received	197
— XIV.	On Essay-Writing in General, and these Essays in Particular	207
— XV.	The Sanguine Temperament	227

Digitized by Google

		Page
ESSAY XVI.	The Organ of Weight	235
— XVII.	The Sympathetic Temperament	255
— XVIII.	Faith and Charity; or, the Union, in Practical Life, of Sincerity and Conciliation	277
— XIX.	Upon the Efficacy of Praise (in Supplement to the Preceding Essay)	295
— XX.	On Self-Control	311
— XXI.	The Modern Misanthrope	325

Digitized by Google

ESSAY I.

ON THE INCREASED ATTENTION TO OUTWARD NATURE IN THE DECLINE OF LIFE

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

ON THE INCREASED ATTENTION TO OUTWARD NATURE IN THE DECLINE OF LIFE.

One of the most common, yet, when considered, one of the most touching characteristics of receding life, is in its finer perception of external nature. You will find men who, in youth and middle age, seeming scarcely to notice the most striking features of some unfamiliar landscape, become minutely observant of the rural scenery around them when the eye has grown dim and the step feeble. They will detect more quickly than the painter the delicate variations made by the lapse of a single day in the tints of autumnal foliage— they will distinguish, among the reeds by the river-side, murmurs that escape the dreamy ear of the poet.

I was acquainted in my schoolboy days with an old man, who, after a metropolitan career of noisy and brilliant success, had slipped away from the London world as from a vulgar mob, and found a Tusculum the reverse of Cicero's, void of books and remote from philosophers, in a dull lone house in a dull flat country. To me no scenery could be less interesting than that amidst which I met him in his quiet rambles: a trite monotony of level downs — neither wood, nor brook, nor undulating hill-top that enlivens solitude with the

Digitized by Google

infinite play of shadows. I was then at the age when we all fancy ourselves poets, and this man, who had but slight esteem for poets, was yet the first in whom I found that close observation of natural objects from which poetry takes the same starting-point as science. He would pause by what seemed to me a barren heap of stones, to examine the wild flower that had forced its way through the crevices; he would point with his stick to what seemed to me but the empty space, till, looking long and steadily, I too saw the gossamer, sailing slow over the niggard stubbles; — and his countenance literally brightened with genial interest whenever we chanced to encounter some adventurous ant carrying its burden of a millet-seed over the Alpine fissures of a yawning cart-rut. I was bound to respect this man, for I was a boy and ambitious, he was old and renowned. He was kind to me, for he had known one of my family in a former generation, and would suffer me to walk by his side, and encourage me by indulgent, possibly contemptuous silence, to pour forth my crude fancies and my vague aspirations, — He, who could have taught me so much, content to listen; I, who could have taught him nothing, well pleased to talk. And so, one day when he had more than usually provoked my resentment by devoting to gossamers and ants the admiring interest I was urging him to bestow upon bards and heroes, I exclaimed, with abrupt candour — "If ever I win a tenth part of your fame, sir, I don't think I shall run away from it into the country, especially into a country in which one has nothing to look at except ants and gossamers!"

The old man stopped short, and, leaning on his stick, first stared at me, and then, musingly, into

Digitized by Google

space. Perhaps my rude speech set him thinking. At last he said, very quietly, and as if more to himself than me, "I shall soon leave the world: men and women I may hope again to see elsewhere, but shall I see elsewhere corn-fields and grass, gossamers and ants?" Again he paused a moment or two, and then added, "As we lose hold of our five senses do we wake up a sixth which had before been dormant — the sense of Nature; or have we certain instincts akin to Nature which are suppressed and overlaid by our reason, and revive only at the age when our reason begins to fail us?"

I think I quote his words with accuracy — certainly their sense; for they puzzled me so much at the time that I often thought over them. And many years afterwards they came back to me in full force when reading the very remarkable conjectures upon instinct that are scattered throughout the works of Sir Humphry Davy; in which that most imaginative of all our men of science suggests, in opposition to the various theories founded upon Locke, that man has instincts, of which revelation is one, and "that many of those powers which have been called instinctive belong to the more refined clothing of the spirit."* Be this as it may, I doubt not that each of my readers will recall some instance analogous to that which I have cited, of the charm which Nature gradually acquires as our steps near the grave which is the vanishing point of her landscape. Year by year, I find that same charm gaining sway over myself. There was one period of my life when I considered every hour spent out of capitals as time wasted — when, with exhilarated spirits, I would return from truant loiterings

* Sir H. Davy's Works, vol. ix. p. 343, 'The Proteus, or Immortality.'

Digitized by Google

under summer trees to the smoke and din of London thoroughfares: I loved to hear the ring of my own tread on the hard pavement. The desire to compete and to combat — the thirst for excitements opening one upon the other in the upward march of an opposed career — the study of man in his thickest haunts — the heart's warm share in the passions which the mind, clear from their inebriety, paused to analyse, — these gave to me, as they give to most active men in the unflagging energies of youth, a delight in the vista of gas-lamps, and the hubbub of the great mart for the interchange of ideas. But now — I love the country as I did when a little child, before I had admitted into my heart that ambition which is the first fierce lesson we learn at school. Is it, partly, that those trees never remind us that we are growing old? Older than we are, their hollow stems are covered with rejoicing leaves. The birds build amid their bowering branches rather than in the lighter shade of the sapling. Nature has no voice that wounds the self-love; her coldest wind nips no credulous affection. She alone has the same face in our age as in our youth. The friend with whom we once took sweet counsel we have left in the crowd, a stranger — perhaps a foe! The woman in whose eyes, some twenty years ago, a paradise seemed to open in the midst of a fallen world, we passed the other day with a frigid bow. She wore rouge and false hair. But those wild flowers under the hedgerow — those sparkles in the happy waters — no friendship has gone from them! — their beauty has no simulated freshness — their smile has no fraudulent deceit.

But there is a deeper truth than all this, in the influence which Nature gains over us in proportion as

Digitized by Google

life withdraws itself from struggle and contention. We are placed on earth for a certain period to fulfil, according to our several conditions and degrees of mind, those duties by which the earth's history is carried on. Desk and warehouse, factory and till, forum and senate, schools of science and art, arms and letters — by these we beautify and enrich our common habitation; by these we defend, bind together, exalt, the destinies of our common race. And during this period the mind is wisely fitted less to contemplate than to act — less to repose than to toil. The great stream of worldly life needs attrition along its banks in order to maintain the law that regulates the movement of its waves. But when that period of action approaches towards its close, the soul, for which is decreed an existence beyond the uses of earth — an existence aloof from desk and warehouse, factory and till, forum and senate, schools of science and art, arms and letters — gradually relaxes its hold of former objects, and, insensibly perhaps to itself, is attracted nearer towards the divine source of all being, in the increasing witchery by which Nature, distinct from Man, reminds it of its independence of the crowd from which it begins to re-emerge.

And, in connection with this spiritual process, it is noticeable how intuitively in age we go back with strange fondness to all that is fresh in the earliest dawn of youth. If we never cared for little children before, we delight to see them roll in the grass over which we hobble on crutches. The grandsire turns wearily from his middle-aged care-worn son to listen with infant laugh to the prattle of an infant grand-child. It is the old who plant young trees; it is the old who are most

Digitized by Google

saddened by the autumn and feel most delight in the returning spring.

And, in the exquisite delicacy with which hints of the invisible eternal future are conveyed to us, may not that instinctive sympathy, with which life in age rounds its completing circle towards the point at which it touches the circle of life in childhood, be a benign intimation that

"Death is nought
But the soul's birth — and so we should it call?" *

And may there be no meaning more profound than the obvious interpretation, in the sacred words, "Make yourselves as little children, for of such is the kingdom of heaven?"

* 'On the Original, Nature, and Immortality of the Soul.' — Sir John Davies.

Digitized by Google

ESSAY II.

ON THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE URBAN AND RURAL TEMPERAMENT.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

ON THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE URBAN AND RURAL TEMPERAMENT.

I HAVE noticed in the previous essay, that increased fondness for rural nature which is among the ordinary characteristics of advancing age, as increase of stillness is among the ordinary attributes of deepening eve. But there are persons who, from first to last, are such special lovers of the country life that they never feel thoroughly at home in the stony labyrinth of capitals; and there are others who, from first to last, would rather look out on a back-yard in St. James's than on the vales under Fiesolè in the hues of a Tuscan autumn, or the waters of Windermere in the hush of an English June.

We, who are lovers of the country, are not unnaturally disposed to consider that our preference argues some finer poetry of sentiment — some steadier devotion to those ennobling studies which sages commend as the fitting occupations of retirement. But the facts do not justify that self-conceit upon our part. It was said by a philosopher who was charged with all the cares of a world's empire, that "there is no such great matter in retirement. A man may be wise and sedate in a crowd as well as in a desert, and keep the noise of the world from getting within him. In this case, as Plato observes, the walls of a town and the enclosure of a

Digitized by Google

sheepfold may be made the same thing."* Certainly poets, and true poets, have lived by choice in the dingy streets of great towns. Men of science, engaged in reasonings the most abstruse, on subjects the most elevating, have usually fixed their dwelling-place in bustling capitals, as if the din of the streets without deepened, by the force of contrast, the quiet of those solitary closets, wherein they sat analysing the secret heart of that Nature, whose everyday outward charms they abandoned to commonplace adorers.

On the other hand, men perforce engaged in urban occupations, neither bards nor sages, but city clerks and traders, feel a yearning of the heart towards a home in the country; loving rural Nature with so pure a fervour that, if closer intercourse be forbidden, they are contented to go miles every evening to kiss the skirt of her robe. Their first object is to live out of London, if but in a suburb; to refresh their eyes with the green of a field; to greet the first harbinger of spring in the primrose venturing forth in their own tiny realm of garden. It is for them, as a class, that cities extend beyond their ancient bounds; while our nobles yet clung to their gloomy halls in the Flete, traders sought homesteads remote from their stalls and wares in the pleasing village of Charing; gradually nobles were allured by the gentle example, and proud villas, with gardens sloping down to the river-side, chased the wood-lark, or rather the bittern, away from the Strand.**

* Marcus Antonius: Jeremy Collier's translation.

** "The trade," says a writer in 1661 (Graunt — 'Observations on Bills of Mortality'), "and very city of London removes westward." I think it is perfectly clear, from the various documents extant, that the movement

Digitized by Google

Nothing more stamps the true Cockney than his hate for the sound of Bow bells. It is in vain that we squirearchs affect to sneer at the rural tastes of the cit in his rood of ground by the highroad to Hampstead: the aquarium stored with minnows and tittlebats; the rock-work of vitrified clinkers, rich with ferns borne from Wales and the Highlands. His taste is not without knowledge. He may tell us secrets in horticulture that would startle our Scotch gardener; and if ever he be rich and bold enough to have a farm, the chances are that he will teach more than he learns from the knowing ones who bet five to one on his ruin. And when these fameless students of Nature ramble forth from the suburb, and get for a while to the real heart of the country — when, on rare summer holidays, they recline, *in remoto gramine*, — they need no choice Falernian, no unguents and brief-lived roses for that interval of full beatitude which the poet invites his friend to snatch from reprieving fates. Their delight proves the truth of my favourite aphorism — "that our happiest moments are those of which the memories are the most innocent."

It is not only the middle class of citizen in which

beyond the city into the suburbs commenced with the smaller shopkeepers, and not with the nobles: first, because the Reports recommending improvements always mention the ground as preoccupied by small tenements; and, secondly, because the royal proclamations, and indeed the enactments of Parliament, in the sixteenth century, against the erection of new buildings within London and Westminster, were evidently directed against the middle or lower classes, and not against the nobles. In the reign of Elizabeth, the Queen's wish would have sufficed for her nobles: and proclamations can restrain the few when they are impotent against the many. But the enactments show, still more positively, that the interdict was intended for the people. No dwelling-houses were to be subdivided into small tenements; all sheds and shops erected within seven years were to be pulled down.

Digitized by Google

the love of rural life is strong. Mechanics and artisans, crowded and pent in towns, have the same luxuriant joy in the sights and sounds of the country.

Turn your horse's head some summer holiday towards the bosky dells of Epping Forest. Suddenly you will come upon a spot in which the genius of our old English poets seems to linger — a fragment of the old "good greenwood," in which "birds are about and singing."

Scattered amidst those venerable trees, stunted as trees are on old forest-ground, but with gnarled fantastic trunks, and opening here and there into glades that might ravish a painter's eye, are seen, no longer indeed dainty dame and highborn cavalier but, weavers from Spitalfields — the carts and wains that brought them drawn up by the roadside. Here a family group gathered round the cups "that cheer but not inebriate;" there, children, whom it gladdens the heart to see at play, for the children of weavers have but a short interval of play between the cradle and the loom; yonder, heeding you not as you ride slowly by, two young sweethearts, talking, perhaps, of some distant time when they may see green fields, even on work-days, from the casements, not of a London attic but, of some thatched cottage, with eaves in which the swallow builds secure; farther on, some studious lad, lonely as Jaques,

"Under the shade of melancholy boughs."

He has brought a book with him, doubtless a poem or work of fiction, that suits with the landscape round, and opens a door in the grassy knolls, like that which, in Scottish legend, admitted the child of earth into the

Digitized by Google

halls of fairyland; yet ever and anon the reader lifts his eyes from the page, and drinks in, with a lengthened gaze, the balm of the blue sky, the freshness of the sylvan leaves.

The mechanics of Manchester are, or were some years ago, notable entomologists. They might be seen on summer evenings issuing forth with their butterfly-nets from smoky lanes, allured, by gossamer wings, over level swards dominated by tall factory-chimneys, as near to their homes and as far from their thoughts as the battle-field of Thermopylæ was from the dwellers in Tempe.

Doubtless, in the pursuit which gives zest and object to these rambles, they obey that instinct of the chase which is one of the primitive ties between man and nature. The passion for field-sports, which is so common amongst the higher classes in England, lies, I think, deep amidst finer and gentler propensities than those which find pleasure in destroying. I put aside the more factitious adjuncts to the charm of the hunting-field: the gossip of the meet, the emulation of the run, the stimulants to the love of applause in the hot competition of rival courage and address. Apart from these exhilarants — which have nothing to do with the love of Nature; by which men might be equally stirred in a tennis-court, or, with higher mental exertion, on the floor of the House of Commons — there is a delight in this frank and hearty commune with rural Nature herself, which unconsciously warms the hunter's heart, and constitutes the most genial portion of his wild enjoyment. His pursuit carried on through seasons in which Nature has the least beauty for those who, like Horace, regard winter as deformed, — he

Digitized by Google

For myself, though no participator in the joys of more vehement sport, I have a pleasure that I cannot reconcile to my abstract notions of the tenderness due to dumb creatures, in the tranquil cruelty of angling. I can only palliate the wanton destructiveness of my amusement by trying to assure myself that my pleasure does not spring from the success of the treachery I practisé towards a poor little fish, but rather from that innocent revelry in the luxuriance of summer life which only anglers enjoy to the utmost. When I have cast my perfidious line over the waves of a lake, or into the dips and hollows of a babbling trout-stream, with all its romantic curvatures into creek and cove, a thousand images, born from poetic sentiment, and giving birth in turn to moralising thought, present themselves to my noonday reverie; images which would never have taken shape had I been pacing to and fro the gravel-walks of my garden. Above all, Nature herself, in that spiritual beauty which keeps opening out from the green deeps as our eye rests on the surface, just as out from some grand author meaning on meaning, secret on secret, will open as we continue to read and re-read the page — Nature herself fascinates and appeals to me when I stand on the grassy banks, and see earth and sky blending light and shadow in the glass of mysterious waters.

This miserable pastime of angling — this base seduction of a credulous fellow-creature with a fraudulent bait — certainly it is not this which charms me hour after hour to solitary moss-grown banks. The pastime is but my excuse for listening so patiently

"From morn till noon, from noon till dewy eve,"

Digitized by Google

to the vague whisperings of the Universal Mother. Why do I need that idle rod to draw me forth to the water-side — why, if no snare of mine near yon water-lily menaced the scaly flocks of Proteus — why could I not recline as long and as contentedly under this bowery elm-tree, watching the reeds quiver where the pike stirs, or noting the wistful eyes of the grasshopper as he halts on my lap, wondering whether I be friend or foe? I know not why. Ask the gunner whether he would walk thirty miles a-day over stubble and turnips, if he had a staff in his hand instead of his Manton.

Man is so formed for design by the Great Designer, that in his veriest amusement he still involuntarily seeks an object. He needs a something definite — a something that pretends to be practical — in order to rivet his attention long to external Nature, however sensitive he may be to her charms. We must have our chase or our angling, our butterfly-net or our geological hammer, or we must be botanists or florists, naturalists, husbandmen, or artists. If we can make to ourselves no occupation out of the many that rural nature affords us, we must be contented, like the Spital-fields weaver, to visit her on rare holidays. Our week-day world is not in her calm retreats.

He who fondly prefers the country to the town, who feels that the best part of him can never develop into bloom and fruit in the atmosphere of capitals, is not, as I commenced by owning, wiser or better, more imaginative or more thoughtful, than he who by choice fixes his home in the busiest haunts of men. But he is probably better and possibly wiser than the *average* number of those who cannot live out of towns. He must possess, if Kant's theory of the Æsthetic be as

Digitized by Google

true as it is lovely, the inborn moral sentiment which allies itself to the immediate, unreasoning, unambitious sympathy with Nature. "He," says the grand philosopher, "who contemplates solitarily (without purpose or object of communicating to others what it pleases himself to observe) the beauty of a wild flower, a bird, an insect — to admire and to love it — who would regret not to find that thing in Nature, independently of all advantage he may draw from it — nay, even if it occasions to him some loss or harm; — it is he who attaches to Nature an interest immediate and intellectual. . . . . That advantage which Natural beauty has over Artistic beauty in alone thus exciting an immediate interest, accords with the purified and solid intelligence of all who have cultivated their moral sentiment. When a man, having sufficient taste to appreciate the productions of the Fine Arts with exactitude and delicate perception, quits without regret the chamber in which glitter those beauties that satisfy vanity and the craving for social distractions, and seeks the beauty of Nature, to find therein a delight that sustains his mind in the direction by which we can never attain the final goal: in that man we suppose a certain beauteousness of soul which we do not attribute to a connoisseur, because the last finds an interest in the objects of Art."

Leaving without comment these passages, which do but loosely and inadequately paraphrase the original (for it would almost require a Plato to translate, and, alas! at times, an Aristotle to comprehend, a Kant), I may suggest some less refining arguments in favour of the proposition that he who prefers the country is perhaps better than the average of those who prefer the

Digitized by Google

town. It is clear that he must have a large share of that negative goodness which consists in the absence of evil. He cannot well be a profligate sensualist, nor an ambitious schemer, nor dependent for enjoyment on the gratification of petty vanities. His sources of pleasure will, at least, be generally pure. He will have that independence of spirit which can stand firm without leaning on other men's minds: to use the fine expression of Locke, "he will have raised himself above the alms-basket, and is not content to live lazily on scraps of begged opinion."* His conscience needs no turbulent excitements to chase away a haunting remembrance. I speak of those who genuinely and truly love the country by natural temperament, not of those who take to it without love, as outlaws who fly into a temple, not to worship at its altar, but to lie hid within its sanctuary. Birds sing in vain to the ear, flowers bloom in vain to the eye, of mortified vanity and galled ambition. He who would know repose in retirement must carry into retirement his destiny, integral and serene, as the Cæsars transported the statue of Fortune into the chamber they chose for their sleep. The picture of the first Lord Holland gnawing out his fierce heart on the downs of Kingsgate, is very different from that of a gentler statesman, Pliny, hailing his reprieve from pomp and power, and exclaiming, in the scholar's true enthusiasm — "O mare, O littus, verum secretumque *Μουσεῖον*, quam multa dictatis, quam multa invenitis!"

Whatever the varying predilections of grown-up men for town or country, one fact needs no proving;

* Introduction to 'Essay on the Human Understanding.'

Digitized by Google

all children prefer the country. Ask any schoolboy up to the age of fifteen, where he would spend his holidays. Not one in five hundred will say, "In the streets of London," if you give him the option of green fields and running waters. It is, then, a fair presumption that there must be something of the child still in the character of the men or the women whom the country charms in maturer as in dawning life.

Among women especially, I own I think better of those who prefer fields to streets. They have not in capitals the grand occupations of laborious men — they have no bar and no senate. At the best, if more than usually cultured and intelligent, they can but interchange such small coins of thought and learning as are spent in talk. But if there be one thing in which intellect can appear to the intellectual either flippant or commonplace, it is the talk of wits in the drawing-rooms of capitals. The worst part of an eminent man's conversation is, nine times out of ten, to be found in that part which he means to be clever. Even in the talk of Dr. Johnson, as recorded by Boswell, the finest things are those which he said to Boswell when nobody was by, and which he could just as well have said in the Hebrides.

The most delicate beauty in the mind of women is, and ever must be, an independence of artificial stimulants for content. It is not so with men. The links that bind men to capitals belong to the golden chain of civilisation — the chain which fastens all our destinies to the throne of Jove. And hence the larger proportion of men in whom genius is pre-eminent have preferred to live in cities, though some of them have bequeathed to us the loveliest pictures of the rural

Digitized by Google

scenes in which they declined to dwell. Certainly nothing in Milton or in Shakespeare more haunts our memory than the passages in which they seem to luxuriate in rural life, as Arcadians in the Golden Age. What voluptuous revelry amongst green leaves in that half-pastoral comedy which has its scene in the Forest of Arden! In the 'Midsummer Night's Dream' how Fancy seems to bury herself, as it were, in the lap of Nature, as the fairies bury themselves in the bells of flowers! Think of Milton, the 'Lycidas,' the 'Comus,' 'L'Allegro,' 'Il Penseroso,' the garden-land of 'Paradise Lost!' Yet Milton seems to have willingly enough spent nearly all his life in "troublous cities pent." Even in his brief holiday abroad it is amongst capitals that he loves to linger. We do not find him, like the poet who has had the widest and loudest fame of our own age, rejoice

> "To sit alone, to muse o'er flood and fell,
> To slowly trace the forest's fading green,
> Where things that own not man's dominion dwell,
> And mortal foot has ne'er or rarely been."

Shakespeare, so far as we know of his life, was from early youth a denizen of London till rich enough to retire; and then he retired, not into the solitudes of the country, but into a social dwelling in the midst of a town, in which, no doubt, he found, and was pleased to find, associates of younger days, with whom he could talk frankly, as great men rarely talk save to those with whom they have played in boyhood.

Most of the more famous modern writers on the Continent have by choice lived in cities — especially the German and the French. And in this they are distinguished from the ancient authors, at least the

Digitized by Google

Latin. Horace had his Sabine farm in the Vale of Ustica; the love of scenery yet more attractive made him take also his cottage amidst the orchards and "mobile rivulets" of Tivoli. He sighed yet for a third country home — a winter retreat in the mild climate of Sorrento. Tibullus, the amorous and the beautiful, passed the larger part of his short life on his estate in the lovely country between Tivoli and Præneste. Ovid, specially the man of gaiety and fashion, lived, it is true, chiefly at Rome (before his mysterious exile), but he had a garden of his own apart from his house, between the Flaminian and Clodian Ways, to which he constantly resorted, as well as his country-seat, the Pelignan farm.

Virgil's house at Rome, like that of Propertius, was ruralised, as it were, by its neighbourhood to the vast gardens of Mæcenas. His favourite residence, however, was at Naples, not actually in the town, if Neapolitan traditions be worthy of credit, but on the outskirts, near his legendary tomb on Posilippo, and facing the bay which sunset colours with such glorious hues.

Even Terence, whose vocation of comic writer might be supposed to fix him amidst the most populous haunts of men, may be fairly presumed, when not in the villas of his patrons, to have spent his time chiefly on his own small estate by the Appian Road, till he vanished into Greece, whence he never returned; dying, according to one report — for there are many reports as to the mode and place of his death — amid the mountain seclusions of Arcady. Every scholar, almost every schoolboy, has got by heart the song in which Catullus vents his rapture on regaining his

Digitized by Google

home on the Sirmian Peninsula. And many a man who has never read Catullus has uttered the same cry of joy in greeting his rural threshold after strange wanderings or lengthened absence. For "what more blessed than to ungird us of our cares — when the mind lays down its fardel, and we come from the toil afar to our own hearth, and repose on the longed-for bed?" Who does not then call on the dear roof to welcome him as if it were a living thing, and echo the sense of that wondrous line —

"Laugh, every dimple in the cheek of home!" *

Cicero's love of the country needs no proof. With his busy life we still associate his quiet Tusculum. Pliny the younger gives us a description, chiefly known to architectural critics, whom it has sadly puzzled, of a rich public man's retreat from the smoke of Rome, only seventeen miles from the city, "so that" (writes Pliny to his friend) "after we have finished the business of the day, we can go thither from town at sunset;" a journey which he calls extremely short when performed on horseback (more tedious in a carriage, because the roads were sandy). Certainly a man must have loved the country well to ride seventeen miles to a house in it after the business of the day. Few English statesmen or lawyers, I suspect, would be equally alert in their sacrifice to the rural deities. But how lovingly Pliny describes the house, with apartments so built as to command the finest

* "Ridete quidquid est Domi cachinnorum."

The translation of the line in the text is by Leigh Hunt. I am not quite satisfied with the version, but I have not met with, and certainly I cannot suggest, a better one.

Digitized by Google

prospects: the terrace before the gallery all perfumed with violets; the gallery itself so placed that the shadow of the building is thrown on the terrace in the forenoon; and at the end of the gallery "the little garden apartment," which he calls his own — his sweetheart — looking on one side to the terrace, on the other to the sea; and then his own bedchamber carefully constructed for the exclusion of noise. No voice of babbling servants, no murmurs from booming seas, reach the room in which, as he tells us elsewhere, he not only sleeps but muses.

"There," he exclaims, in that charming letter* wherein he compares that petty gossip of the town, which seems, while you are in town, to be so sensible and rational, but of which you say when you get into the country, "How many days have I wasted on trifles!" — "there," he exclaims, "there, at my Laurentium, I hear nothing that I repent to have heard, say nothing that I repent to have said; no hopes delude, and no fears molest me. Welcome, thou life of integrity and virtue! *O dulce otium, honestumque, ac pœne omni negotio pulchrius!*"

We have no absolute warrant for fixing the voluntary choice of the great poets of Athens either in town or country. But we know, from ample authority, that the possession of a rural home was the passionate craving of an Athenian. Up to the date of the Peloponnesian War most of the Athenian citizens resided habitually with their families in the country. And when compelled, at the outbreak of that war, to come within the blind walls of the city, each man grieved,

* Book I. Epist. IX. to Minutius Fundinus.

Digitized by Google

as if in leaving his rural home he was leaving his own civil polity, yea, his own proper city, behind him.*

The burly Demos itself is represented by Aristophanes much as our old-fashioned caricatures represented John Bull — a shrewd and grumbling farmer thinking how votes might affect his crops. It may not, therefore, be presumptuous to suppose that Sophocles had a favourite retreat on the chalky soil of his native Colonus, and listened, many a returning sping, to "the nightingales that tenanted the dark ivy, and greeted the narcissus, ancient coronal of mighty goddesses, as it burst into bloom under the dews of heaven."** Or that the wronged and melancholy Euripides might have gathered his consoling books (Athenæus tells us that he was an ardent book-collector) into some suburban dwelling-place by the banks of that Cephisus, of which, in the headlong rush of his darkest tragedy, he pauses to chant the tempering breeze and the fragrant rose.***

The town temperament is in general anxious, aspiring, combative; the rural temperament quiet, unambitious, peaceful.

But the town temperament has this advantage over the rural — a man may by choice fix his home in cities, yet have the most lively enjoyment of the country when he visits it for recreation; while the man who, by choice, settles habitually in the country, there deposits his household gods, and there moulds his habits of thought to suit the life he has selected, usually feels

* Thucyd., lib. i. c. xvi. See Bloomfield's note on the passage referred to.

** Œdip. Col., from line 668,

*** 'Medea,' 842.

Digitized by Google

an actual distress, an embarrassment, a pain, when, from time to time, he drops, a forlorn stranger, on the London pavement. He cannot readily brace his mind to the quick exertions for small objects that compose the activity of the Londoner. He has no interest in the gossip about persons he does not know; the very weather does not affect him as it does the man who has no crops to care for. When the Londoner says, "What a fine day!" he shakes his head dolefully, and mutters, "Sadly in want of rain."

The London sparrows, no doubt, if you took them into the forest glens of Hampshire, would enjoy the change very much; but drop the thrush and linnet of Hampshire into St. James's Square, and they would feel very uneasy at the prospect before them. You might fill all the balconies round with prettier plants than thrush and linnet ever saw in the New Forest, but they would not be thrush and linnet if they built their nest in such coverts.

Digitized by Google

ESSAY III.

ON MONOTONY IN OCCUPATION AS A SOURCE OF HAPPINESS.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

ON MONOTONY IN OCCUPATION AS A SOURCE OF HAPPINESS.

For things to be distinctly remembered, it is not enough that they should delight the senses and captivate the fancy. They must have a certain measured duration, in harmony with the previous impressions on the mind. Thus the airs of the Æolian harp, ravishing though they are, cannot be committed to memory, because no time is observed in their music.

When we look back over a lengthened series of years, we seldom find that remembrance clings fondly to moments in which the mind has been the most agitated, the passions most active, but rather to the intervals in which hour stole on hour with the same quiet tread. The transitory fever of the senses it is only a diseased imagination that ponders over and recalls; the triumphs which flatter our self-esteem look pale and obsolete from the distance of years, as arches of lath and plaster, thrown up in haste for the march of a conqueror, seem frail and tawdry when we see them, in after time, spanning the solid thoroughfares with columns already mouldering, and stripped of the banners and the garlands that had clad them in the bravery of an hour.

Digitized by Google

Howsoever varied the courses of our life, whatsoever the phases of pleasure and ambition through which it has swept along, still, when in memory we would revive the times that were comparatively the happiest, those times will be found to have been the calmest.

As the body for health needs regularity in habits, and will even reconcile itself to habits not in themselves best fitted for longevity, with less injury to the system than might result from abrupt changes to the training by which athletes attain their vigour — so the mind for health needs a certain clockwork of routine; we like to look forward with a tranquil sentiment of security; when we pause from the occupation of to-day, which custom has made dear to us, there is a charm in the mechanical confidence with which we think that the same occupation will be renewed at the same hour to-morrow. And thus monotony itself is a cause and element of happiness which, amidst the shifting tumults of the world, we are apt to ignore. Plutarch, indeed, says truly* that "the shoe takes the form of the foot, not the foot the form of the shoe," meaning thereby that "man's life is moulded by the disposition of his soul." But new shoes chafe the foot, new customs the soul. The stoutest pedestrian would flag on a long walk if he put on new shoes at every second mile.

It is with a sentiment of misplaced pity, perhaps of contempt still more irrational, that the busy man, whose existence is loud and noisy, views another who seems to him less to live than to vegetate. The traveller, whirled from capital to capital, stops for a night's

* Plutarch, 'On the Tranquillity of the Soul.'

Digitized by Google

lodging at some convent rising lone amidst unfrequented hills. He witnesses the discipline of the monastic life drilled into unvarying forms, day and year portioned out, according to inch scale, by the chimes of the undeviating bell. He re-enters his carriage with a sense of relief; how dreary must be the existence he leaves behind! Why dreary? Because so monotonous. Shallow reasoner! it is the monotony that has reconciled the monk to his cell. Even prisoners, after long years, have grown attached to the sameness of their prison, and have shrunk back from the novelty of freedom when turned loose upon the world. Not that these illustrations constitute a plea for monastery or prison; they but serve to show that monotony, even under circumstances least favourable to the usual elements of happiness, becomes a happiness in itself, growing, as it were, unseen, out of the undisturbed certainty of peculiar customs. As the pleasure the ear finds in rhyme is said to arise from its recurrence at measured periods — from the gratified expectation that at certain intervals certain effects will be repeated — so it is in life: the recurrence of things same or similar, the content in the fulfilment of expectations so familiar and so gentle that we are scarcely conscious that they were formed, have a harmony and a charm, and, where life is enriched by no loftier genius, often make the only difference between its poetry and its prose.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

ESSAY IV.

ON THE NORMAL CLAIRVOYANCE OF THE IMAGINATION

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

ON THE NORMAL CLAIRVOYANCE OF THE IMAGINATION.

Most men are sceptical as to the wonders recorded of mesmeric clairvoyance. "I concede," says the cautious physiologist, "that you may produce a kind of catalepsy upon a highly nervous subject; that in that state of quasi-catalepsy there may pass through the brain a dream, which the dreamer is able to repeat, and which, in repeating, he may colour or exaggerate according to an unconscious sympathy (called *rapport* by the mesmerists) with the will of the person who has cast him into sleep, or according to a bias of his own mind, of which at the moment he may not be aware. But to conceive that a person in this abnormal state can penetrate into the most secret thoughts of another — traverse, in spirit, the region of time and space — describe to me in London what is being done by my son in Bombay — 'see,' says Sir Henry Holland, 'through other organs than the eyes,' and be wise through other faculties than the reason, — is to contradict all we know of the organisation of man, and of the agencies established by nature."

But it seems to me that there is a clairvoyance much more marvellous than that which the followers

Digitized by Google

of Puysegur* attribute to the mesmeric trance, but which, nevertheless, no physiologist ever presumes to gainsay. For the most ardent believer in the gift of mesmeric clairvoyance, if his belief be grounded upon actual experience, will be the first to admit that the powers it bestows are extremely capricious and uncertain — that although a somnambulist tells you accurately to-day the cause of an intricate disease or the movements of your son in Bombay, he may not be able to-morrow to detect a cold in your head or tell you what is done by your next-door neighbour. So uncertain, indeed, so unreliable, are the higher phenomena ascribed to mesmeric clairvoyance, that experiments of such phenomena almost invariably fail when subjected to those tests which the incredulous not unreasonably demand. And even when fostered by the submissive faith of witnesses the most reverential, and developed by *rapport* the most sympathetic, the experienced mesmeriser is aware that he must be exceedingly cautious how he attempt to extract any practical uses from the advice or predictions dictated by this mystical second-sight; the more wonderful its occasional accuracy, the more he is on his guard against the grave dangers into which he would be decoyed did he believe that such accuracy could be faithfully reproduced at will, and so led on to exchange for irresponsible oracles the conclusions to be drawn from his own sober sense.

* The theory of Clairvoyance does not originate in Mesmer, but in the experiments of his disciple, Count Puysegur. I am not sure that Mesmer ever acknowledged the existence of clairvoyance to the extent claimed for its manifestations by Puysegur. He certainly did not attach the same importance to its phenomena. Though I have made use of the phrase *Mesmeric* clairvoyance, it is not therefore strictly correct. It ought

Digitized by Google

It is recorded, upon evidence so respectable that I will assume it to be sufficient, that a clairvoyant has tracked to detection a murder which had baffled the keenest research of the police; that another clairvoyant, a day before the Derby, minutely described the incidents of the race, and truthfully predicted the winner, the colours of the rider, the name of the horse. But sure I am that no mesmeriser who has had practical experience of the most remarkable somnambules in Europe, would venture to risk his own repute in denouncing as criminals those whom the same clairvoyant who had once tracked a murder might circumstantially indicate and unhesitatingly accuse when next applied to in aid of justice, or would hazard his own money on the horse which the same clairvoyant, whose vaticinations on the Derby were once so mysteriously truthful, might, when again invoked, single out as the winner.

No man has sacrificed more for the cause of mesmerism than Dr. Elliotson, and perhaps no man would more earnestly warn a neophyte — startled by his first glimpse of phenomena, which, developed to the utmost by the priesthood of Delphi, once awed to subjection the luminous intellect of Greece — not to accept the lucky guesses of the Pythian for the infallible response of Apollo.

It is not only, then, the extreme rarity of mesmeric clairvoyance approaching in any degree to that finer

rather to be *Puysegurian* clairvoyance. But I agree with Malebranche, that where we desire to be understood we should use words that correspond with previous associations. And especially in essays of so familiar a character as these, it would be mere pedantry to coin new words for the expression of established ideas.

Digitized by Google

vision of which the advocates for its existence contend as a fact not the less certain because it is admitted to be rare — but it is far more the fickleness and uncertainty to which that vision itself is subjected, even in the most gifted clairvoyant whom the most accomplished mesmeriser can discover, which has made the phenomena of clairvoyance available to no definite purposes of knowledge.

How little has mesmeric clairvoyance realised the hopes that were based on the early experiments of Puysegur! With all its assumptions of intelligence more than mortal, it has not solved one doubtful problem in science. It professes to range creation on the wings of a spirit, but it can no more explain to us what is "spirit," than it can tell us what is heat or electricity. It assumes to diagnosticate in cases that have baffled the Fergusons and Brodies — it cannot tell us the cause of an epidemic. It has a cure for all diseases — it has not added to the pharmacopœia a single new remedy. It can read the thoughts hoarded close in your heart, the letter buttoned-up in your pocket, — and when it has done so, *cui bono!* you start, you are astonished, you cry "Miraculous!" but the miracle makes you no wiser than if you had seen the trick of a conjuror.

There is another specialty in the restricted domain of clairvoyance: it is inferior to all systematic art and science in this — it does not improve by practice. A clairvoyant may exercise his gifts every day in the year for twenty years, and is no better at the end of the twentieth year than he was at the commencement of the first. Nay, on the contrary, many connoisseurs in mesmerism prefer as the most truthful the youngest

Digitized by Google

and rawest Pythoness they can obtain, and are inclined to view with distrust all sibyls in lengthened professional practice. But when we deny, as a thing too preternatural, too transcendent for human attainment, this very limited and very precarious, unimprovable, unprofitable specialty of certain morbid constitutions, does it never strike us that there is something much more marvellous in that normal clairvoyance which imagination bestows upon healthful brains?

It is no rare phenomenon for a poet "to see through other organs than his eyes;" to describe with an accuracy that astounds a native the lands which he has never beheld; it is no rare phenomenon for historian or dramatist to read the most secret thoughts in the hearts of men who lived a thousand years ago! And their clairvoyance immeasurably exceeds, in the marvel of its second-sight, the clairvoyance ascribed to the most eminent somnambule, inasmuch as it is not precarious and fluctuating — a glimpse into light "above the visible diurnal sphere" swallowed up in Cimmerian darkness, but calm and habitual, improved by increasing practice, courting tests and giving them; the larger and more mingled the crowd of spectators, the more surely does their clairvoyance display its powers and confound the sceptic by its proofs. And whereas the clairvoyance of the somnambule has solved no riddle in nature, added no invention to art, the clairvoyance of wakeful intellect has originated all the manifold knowledge we now possess — predicted each step of our progress — divined every obstacle that encumbered the way — lit beacons that never fade in the wastes of the past — taken into its chart the headlands that loom through the future. Every art, every craft that gives

Digitized by Google

bread to the millions, came originally forth from some brain that saw it first in the typical image. Before the very paper I write on could be fashioned from rags, some musing inventor must have seen in his lucid clairvoyance the idea of a thing that was not yet existent. It is obviously undeniable that every invention added to our uses must have been invented before it was seen — that is, its image must have appeared to the inventor "through some other organ than his eyes."

It is amusing to read the ingenious hypotheses framed by critics who were not themselves poets, in order to trace in Shakespeare's writings the footprints of his bodily life. I have seen it inferred as proof positive, from the description of the samphire-gatherer, that Shakespeare must have stood on the cliffs of Dover. I have followed the inductions of an argument intended to show, from the fidelity of his colourings of Italian scenery, that Shakespeare must have travelled into Italy. His use of legal technicalities has been cited as a satisfactory evidence that he had been an attorney's clerk; his nice perception of morbid anatomy has enrolled him among the sons of Æsculapius as a medical student; and from his general tendency to philosophical speculation it has been seriously maintained that Shakespeare was not Shakespeare at all. So fine a philosopher could not have been a vagabond stage-player; he must have been the prince of professed philosophers — the Lord Chancellor of Nature — Bacon himself, and no other! But does it not occur to such discriminating observers that Shakespeare's knowledge is no less accurate when applied to forms of life and periods of the world into which his personal ex-

Digitized by Google

perience could not possibly have given him an insight, than it was when applied to the description of Dover Cliff, or couched in a metaphor borrowed from the law courts? Possibly he might have seen with his own bodily eyes the samphire-gatherer hanging between earth and sky; but with his own bodily eyes had he seen Brutus in his tent on the fatal eve of Philippi? Possibly he might have scrawled out a deed of conveyance to John Doe; but had he any hand in Cæsar's will, or was he consulted by Mark Antony as to the forensic use to which that will could be applied in obtaining from a Roman jury a verdict against the liberties of Rome? To account for Shakespeare's lucidity in things done on earth before Dover Cliff had been seen by the earliest Saxon immigrant, there is but one supposition agreeable to the theory that Shakespeare must have seen Dover Cliff with his own bodily eyes because he describes it so well: Shakespeare must have been, not Lord Bacon, but Pythagoras, who had lived as Euphorbus in the times of the Trojan war, and who, under some name or other (why not in that of Shakespeare?) might therefore have been living in the reign of Elizabeth, linking in one individual memory the annals of perished states and extinguished races.

But then, it may be said, "Shakespeare is an exception to all normal mortality: no rule applicable to inferior genius can be drawn from the specialty of that enigmatical monster!"

This assertion would not be correct. Shakespeare is indeed the peerless prince of clairvoyants — "Nec viget quidquam simile aut secundum." But the scale of honour descends downward, and down, not only through

Digitized by Google

the Dii Majores of Genius, but to many an earthborn Curius and Camillus.

The gift of seeing through other organs than the eyes is more or less accurately shared by all in whom imagination is strongly concentred upon any selected object, however distant and apart from the positive experience of material senses. Certainly if there were any creature in the world whom a quiet prim respectable printer could never have come across in the flesh and the blood, it would be a daring magnificent libertine — a *roué* of fashion the most exquisitely urbane — a prodigal of wit the most riotously lavish. It was only through clairvoyance that a Richardson could have ever beheld a Lovelace. But Richardson does not only behold Lovelace, he analyses and dissects him — minutes every impulse in that lawless heart, unravels every web in that wily brain. The refiners on Shakespeare who would interpret his life from his writings, and reduce his clairvoyance into commonplace reminiscence, would, by the same process of logic, prove Richardson to have been the confidential valet of Wilmot Lord Rochester; or, at least in some time of his life, to have been a knavish attorney in the Old Bailey of love. Nothing is more frequent among novelists, even third-rate and fourth-rate, than "to see through other organs than their eyes." Clairvoyance is the badge of all their tribe. They can describe scenes they have never witnessed more faithfully than the native who has *lived* amid those scenes from his cradle.

I could cite many indisputable proofs of this phenomenon amongst my brethren in the masonry of fiction; but as I here contend that the gift, so far from being a rare attribute of genius, is shared, in a greater or

Digitized by Google

lesser degree, by all who concentre imagination on particular objects, I abstain from a reference that would not convey the homage of a compliment, but the affront of a disparagement. And, therefore, neither in self-conceit, nor in self-depreciation, but just as a chemist who suggests a theory naturally adds to his suggestion the statement of his own experiments, I offer my personal evidence in favour of the doctrine I advance — viz., "that there is nothing so rare as to excite our incredulous wonder in the faculty of seeing 'through other organs than the eyes.'" I have had sometimes to describe minutely, scenes which, at the time of describing, I had never witnessed. I visited those scenes later. I then examined them, with a natural apprehension that I must have committed some notable mistake to be carefully corrected in any subsequent edition of the work in which such descriptions had been temerariously adventured. In no single instance could I ever find, after the most rigid scrutiny, that the clairvoyance of imagination had deceived me. I found nothing in the scenery I witnessed to induce me to retouch an outline or a colouring in the scenery I had imagined. I am not sure, indeed, that I could not describe the things I imagine more exactly than the things I habitually see. I am not sure that I could not give a more truthful picture of the Nile, which I have never beheld except in my dreams, than I could of the little lake at the bottom of my own park, on the banks of which I loitered out my schoolboy holidays, and (could I but hallow their turf as Christian burial-ground) would desire to choose my grave.

Well, but is it only poets and novelists — creatures whom my stockbroker would call "the children of

Digitized by Google

fancy," and my apothecary classify amongst "highly-nervous patients" — is it only poets and novelists on whom the faculty of seeing "through other organs than the eyes" is bestowed?

When the great Rothschild leant his burly back against the old grey column in the money mart — "cuncta supercilio movens" — no one could suppose that he founded his calculations on the numbers of the Hebrew Cabala — no one could ascribe to him any profound knowledge even of vulgar fractions. Shallow disparagers said, no doubt, that the luminous Jew had ample sources of secret information. So he had! But other Jews have had sources of secret information brought to bear on a judgment more cultured than that of the letterless Rothschild, and have still never gained his clairvoyance.

Ten physicians may be equals in learning — know, with equal minuteness, our anatomical structure — may with equal research have ransacked the lore of prescriptions, scrutinised the same number of tongues, counted the same number of pulses; — but if I want to know what is really the cause of my suffering, I am assured by my apothecary that there is one man out of these ten physicians who "has the doctor's eye" — that is, the gift of clairvoyance.

Men disciplined in the study of severest science, only through reason discover what through imagination they previse. I was mistaken in calling Shakespeare "peerless" in the gift of clairvoyance — Newton's clairvoyance is not less marvellous than Shakespeare's. To imagine the things they have never seen, and to imagine them accurately, constitutes the poetry of philosophers, as it constitutes the philosophy of poets.

Digitized by Google

Kant startled an Englishman with a description of Westminster Bridge, so minutely detailed, that his listener in amazement asked him how many years he had lived in London? Kant had never been out of Prussia — scarcely out of Königsberg.

Take that department of knowledge in which we most beware of mere fancy — "political knowledge." Who has not heard of "the prophetic eye of the statesman"? Nor is it only the great minister, to whose hands nations confide the destiny of races unborn, in whom this clairvoyance is notable. On the contrary, I suspect that men in high office, compelled to deal with business as it rises from day to day, have less of "the prophetic eye" than many an obscure politician who has never gone to sleep on the Treasury bench. I have known men who sat on fifth rows in the House of Commons, and have never been heard in debate — nay, I have known men who never sat in Parliament at all — in whom "the prophetic eye" has been as sure as Cassandra's. Men, who behold afar off the shadows of events not yet coming — predict the questions that will divide cabinets yet unformed — name, amongst the adversaries of such questions, the converts by whose aid the questions will be carried — and fix, as if they had read it in the almanac, the very date in which some crotchety motion, the nursling of a minority, will rise into place amongst the laws of the land. Two men have I known, who, in this gift of political prevision, excelled all the chiefs of our senate; the one was a saturnine tailor, the other a meditative saddler.

The truth really seems to be, that the imagination acquires by custom a certain involuntary, unconscious

Digitized by Google

power of observation and comparison, correcting its own mistakes, and arriving at precision of judgment, just as the outward eye is disciplined to compare, adjust, estimate, measure, the objects reflected on the back of its retina. The imagination is but the faculty of glassing images; and it is with exceeding difficulty, and by the imperative will of the reasoning faculty resolved to mislead it, that it glasses images which have no prototype in truth and nature. I can readily imagine a wombat which I have never seen; but it is only with violent effort, and constrained by the false assurance of some naturalist, whose authority has subjected my reason, which in turn subjects my imagination, that I can imagine a wombat with two heads.

If an Oriental idolater figured to himself a deity in the form of a man, but with the beak of an eagle or the horns of a bull, it was because, by some philosophical abstraction, founded on metaphysical inquiries into the attributes of deity, the eagle's beak was a symbol of superterrestrial majesty — the bull's horns a symbol of superhuman power. This is not the error of simple, childlike imagination, but the deluding subtlety of parables in metaphysical science. Where the imagination is left clear from disturbing causes — no confusing shadow cast upon its wave from the shores that confine it — there, with an equal fidelity, it reflects the star that is aloof from it by myriads of miles, or the heron that has just soared from the neighbouring reeds.

The clairvoyance of poet or novelist is lucid in proportion as, while intent on forms remote, it is unruffled by the shift and change which are constantly varying the outlines of things familiar. On what im-

Digitized by Google

mediately affects ourselves in our practical personal existence our perceptions are rarely clear. The ablest lawyer, when threatened by a lawsuit that puts in jeopardy his own estate, will take the advice of another counsel, whose judgment is free from the anxiety that affects his own; the most penetrating physician, when seriously ill himself, summons a fellow-practitioner to examine his symptoms and prescribe his remedy.

Be our business in life howsoever hard and prosaic, we shall not attain any eminent success in its conduct if we despise the clairvoyance which imagination alone bestows. No man can think justly but what he is compelled to imagine — that is, his thoughts must come before him in images. Every thought not distinctly imaged is imperfect and abortive.

Hence, when some lover of the marvellous tells me, gape-mouthed, of the last astounding phenomenon in mesmeric clairvoyance, I somewhat disappoint him by saying, "Is that all?" For I cannot pass half-an-hour in my library — I cannot converse familiarly with any one capable of the simplest invention by which a thing or a thing's uses not discovered yesterday, seen to-day "through other organs than the eyes," will to-morrow be added to the world's practical possessions — but what I find instances of normal clairvoyance immeasurably more wonderful than those erratic gleams of lucidity in magnetic sleep, which one man reveres as divine and another man disdains as incredible.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

ESSAY V.

ON INTELLECTUAL CONDUCT AS DISTINCT FROM MORAL: THE "SUPERIOR MAN."

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

ON INTELLECTUAL CONDUCT AS DISTINCT FROM MORAL: THE "SUPERIOR MAN."

Not unfrequently we find the world according high position to some man in whom we recognise no merits commensurate with that superiority which we are called upon to confess; no just claims to unwonted deference, whether in majestic genius or heroic virtue; no titles even to that conventional homage which civilised societies have agreed to render to patrician ancestry or to plebeian wealth. The moral character, the mental attributes, of this Superior Man, adorned by no pomp of heraldic blazonry, no profusion of costly gilding, seem to us passably mediocre; yet mediocrity, so wont to be envious, acknowledges his eminence, and sets him up as an authority. He is considered more safe than genius; more practical than virtue. Princes, orators, authors, yield to his mysterious ascendancy. He imposes himself on gods and men, quiet and inexorable as the Necessity of the Greek poets. Why or wherefore the Olympians should take for granted his right to the place he assumes, we know not, we humbler mortals; but we yield, where they yield; — idle to contend against Necessity.

Yet there is a cause for every effect; and a cause there must be for the superiority of this Superior Man, in whom there is nothing astonishing except his success.

Digitized by Google

Examined closely, the cause may be found in this: True that his intellectual stature is no higher than ours, but, whether from art or from nature, it has got a portlier demeanour and a statelier gait. We do not measure its inches — we are so struck by the way it carries itself.

In a word, there is an intellectual conduct as well as a moral conduct; and as a fellow-mortal, in whom the gross proportions of good or evil are much about the average, may so conduct himself morally, that somehow or other his faults are always in the shade, and his merits always in the sunlight, so a fellow-mortal may conduct himself intellectually; taking care that such mind as he has is never surprised in unfavourable positions.

There are various secrets for that exaltation of mediocrity which is so felicitously illustrated in the repute of "the Superior Man." Perhaps the secret most efficacious is to be found in judicious parsimony of speech. The less said the better. "Facunda silentia linguæ," as Gray expresses it, with all his characteristic happiness of epithet. If the exigencies of social life would allow of rigid silence, I do not doubt that rigid silence, with a practised discipline of countenance, and a significant diplomacy of gesture, would be esteemed the special indication of wisdom. For as every man has a right to be considered innocent till he be proved guilty, so every man has a right to be considered exempt from folly till he be proved foolish. It would be difficult to prove a man foolish who keeps himself to himself, and never commits his tongue to the risk of an opinion.

A certain nobleman, some years ago, was con-

Digitized by Google

spicuous for his success in the world. He had been employed in the highest situations at home and abroad, without one discoverable reason for his selection, and without justifying the selection by one proof of administrative ability. Yet at each appointment the public said — "A great gain to the Government! Superior man!" And when from each office he passed away, or rather passed imperceptibly onward towards office still more exalted, the public said — "A great loss to the Government! Superior man!" He was the most silent person I ever met. But when the first reasoners of the age would argue some knotty point in his presence, he would, from time to time, slightly elevate his eyebrows, gently shake his head, or, by a dexterous smile of significant complacency, impress on you the notion how easily he could set those babblers right, if he would but condescend to give voice to the wisdom within him.

I was very young when I first met this Superior Man; and chancing the next day to call on the late Lord Durham, I said, in the presumption of early years, "I passed six mortal hours last evening in company with Lord ——. I don't think there is much in him!"

"Good heavens!" cried Lord Durham, "how did you find that out? Is it possible that he could have — talked?"

The Pythagorean example set by the fortunate peer I have referred to, few can emulate to an equal abnegation of the hazardous faculty of speech. But the more a man, desirous to pass at a value above his worth, can contract by dignified silence the garrulity of trivial minds, the more the world will give him

Digitized by Google

credit for the wealth which he does not possess. When we see a dumb strong-box with its lid braced down in iron clasps, and secured by a jealous padlock, involuntarily we suppose that its contents must be infinitely more precious than the gauds and nicknacks which are unguardedly scattered about a lady's drawing-room. Who could believe that a box so rigidly locked had nothing in it but odds and ends, which would be just as safe in a bandbox? When we analyse the virtue of a prudent silence, we gain a clue to other valuable secrets in the mystery of intellectual conduct. The main reason why silence is so efficacious an element of repute, is — 1st, because of that magnification which proverbially belongs to the unknown; and, 2dly, because silence provokes no man's envy, and wounds no man's self-love. Hence the gifts congruous to, and concomitant with, the genius of taciturnity are — 1st, that general gravity of demeanour which Rochefoucauld happily terms "the mystery of the body;" and, 2dly, an abstinence from all the shows and pretences by which one man provokes the self-love of others in the arrogant parade of his own self-esteem.

He who, seeing how much Appearances govern the world, desires himself to achieve the rank of an Appearance, and obtain, as such, the credit that is accorded to the substance of merit, yet be as safe as a phantom against the assaults to which the substance is unavoidably exposed, will be duly mindful of the rules thus prescribed to his conduct of himself. His life will be as void as his talk of all aggressive brilliancy. His dress will be decorous — for a sloven invites ridicule; but studious of that plainness which disarms

Digitized by Google

the jealousy of fops. His entertainments will be hospitable, his table good — for civilised man has the gratitude of the palate; but he will shun the ostentation which wounds the pride of the poor, and irritates the vanity of the rich. The guest should carry away with him the benignant reminiscence of a courteous reception and a savoury repast, with a heart unaggrieved by a mortifying pomp, and a digestion unspoilt by splenetic envy. Dante says of the valley in which his pilgrimage commences, *Dove il sol tace* — "Where the sun is silent." The sun of the Man superior to his deserts is always silent.

In his intellectual conduct, this admirable Personage thus on principle avoids making enemies. Extreme in nothing, and neutral whenever he can be so without giving offence, he is no violent party-man. Violent party-men are always ill-used by the chiefs of party; it is the moderate men whom the chiefs desire to secure; and even the antagonistic journals do not blame the Minister who rewards the seasonable vote of a judicious temporiser by the place he is not so rashly grateful as to bestow on a supporter indiscreetly enthusiastic. On the other hand, the Superior Man steers as clear from inconvenient friendships as from vindictive enmities. He confides to no one his infirmities or his sorrows; in his intervals of bodily sickness he only complains to his physician; for infirmity and sorrow are indisputable evidences of our frail mortality, and as such they *deconsider* (may the Gallicism be pardoned) the idealised Appearance to which the mortal is refined. The sham or eidolon of a Superior Man cannot afford to be convicted of a weakness. He puts it into the power of no Pylades to say, "Poor

Digitized by Google

Orestes, what a pity he should be so fond of that baggage Hermione!" The Superior Man sows only a plentiful crop of useful acquaintances. He is as much bound by his tenure of position to avoid sowing friends as the farmer was bound in old leases to abstain from sowing flax. Flax and friendship draw from the soil more nutriment than they give back to it.

The Superior Man is not one with whom you would take a liberty. You do not expect from him those trifling services which you ask from the man who permits you to consider him your friend; you do not write to him to hire you a house or engage you a servant; you never say of him, "The best creature alive!" Consequently he escapes all the taxes which social intercourse levies on the man who is weak enough to pay them. He is asked for nothing; so that when he gives something, unsolicited and of his own accord, his generosity is in all men's mouths.

To preserve this sublime independence from the claims of others, it is essential that the Superior Man should never be known to ask for anything for himself. Nor does he; he gets what he wants without asking: offers are made to him; the things he desires are pressed upon him; he accepts them — from a sense of duty! He is fond of the word Duty; it is often in his mouth; it is a word that offends nobody, and has in this an advantage over significants of merit more high-sounding — such as Honour, Virtue, Morality, Religion. He owes a duty to himself — to make the most of himself that he possibly can do. He discharges that duty — as if he were a martyr to the public.

The Superior Man never calumniates, never wantonly slanders another; but he never provokes hostility by

Digitized by Google

admiring or by defending another. All men worthy of praise are sure to have powerful antagonists to whom the praise of them is offensive. To praise a great man is a challenge and an insult to those who decry. But why go out of one's way to take his part? Is he a great man? Then Posterity will do him justice; leave him to Posterity; Posterity can do you no harm. Besides, admiration of another is a half confession of inferiority in yourself. Who admires that which he possesses in a superior degree? The Superior Man, so long as he maintains himself an Appearance, possesses everything to a degree superior to those by whom anything is indiscreetly adventured. If he do not do so, it is for you to discover it, not for him to confess it. Usually, therefore, when the Superior Man speaks of a great man, it is with a delicate kindness, an exquisite indulgent compassion, that attests his own superiority. The veteran hero is "my poor old friend;" the rising statesman is "that clever young fellow — as times go!" The Superior Man, whatever his birth, is in one respect at least always a gentleman — in appearance. He is not cringing to the lofty — he is not rude to the lowly. He knows that the real Great World, with all its disparities, has at heart much of the democracy of a public school; and he avails himself of that truth to obtain, in a general well-bred way, the privileges of equality with all whom he shakes by the hand. This is to his advantage; for he so contrives it that those whose hands are of no use to him are contented with his gracious and cordial nod. The hands he shakes are the hands that help him to rise.

He is what the world calls "an Enlightened Man;" but, practical as well as enlightened, while he keeps

Digitized by Google

up with his own time he never goes beyond it. What to him is all time after he shall have gone to his grave? "I dead, the world is dead," saith the Italian proverb. Nor are his opinions known till as a Superior Man he is sure to be in his right place with the superior party. If this Christian people were to turn Mohammedan, so long as they were in a state of transition, the Superior Man would slip out of sight. You would hear nothing of him while saints were fighting and martyrs burning. But when the crisis was over, and St Paul's Cathedral was converted into the Grand Mosque, you would see him walking down the street, on his way to the temple, arm-in-arm with the Prime Minister.

Digitized by Google

ESSAY VI.

ON SHYNESS.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

ON SHYNESS.

PLUTARCH has an essay upon that defect which he calls Dusopia (δυσωπία) — a word signifying an unhappy facility of being put out of countenance — viz., shamefacedness — shyness. Plutarch seems to consider that Dusopia consisted chiefly in the difficulty of saying No; and has a stock of anecdotes illustrating the tragic consequences which may result from that pusillanimous characteristic of Shyness. It not only subjects us to the loss of our money when a slippery acquaintance asks us for a loan which we are perfectly aware he never intends to repay, but sometimes life itself is the penalty of that cowardly shyness which cannot say No to a disagreeable invitation. Antipater was invited to an entertainment by Demetrius, and, feeling ashamed to evince distrust of a man whom he himself had entertained the day before, went forebodingly to the shambles. Polysperchon had been bribed by Cassander to make away with Hercules, the young son whom Barsina bore to Alexander. Accordingly he invited Hercules to supper. So long as Hercules could get off the invitation by note or message, he valiantly excused himself; but when Polysperchon called in person, and said, burlily, "Why do you refuse my invitation? — Gods! can you suspect me of any design against your

Digitized by Google

life?" poor Hercules was too shy to imply, by continued refusal, that such design was exactly what he suspected. Accordingly he suffered himself to be carried away, and in the midst of the supper was murdered.

Nowadays, Shyness does not entail on us a fate so lugubriously tragic. True, that a perfidious host does his best to poison us by a villanous *entrée*, or "the pure beverage" secured to us, by commercial treaty, at a shilling a bottle; still the effect is not usually mortal. Permitted to return home, we have a fair chance of recovery. The poison may be neutralised by sable antidotes, combining salts with senna; or scientifically withdrawn from the system, by applying an instrument, constructed on hydraulic principles, to the cavity assigned to digestive operations.

I do not, therefore, cite from Plutarch the fate of Hercules as a fair instance of the danger we may anticipate, if too shy to say No to an invitation which it oppresses the spirits to accept; but rather to notice, with a certain consolatory pride (being myself somewhat shy by original constitution), how much, in one peculiar development of Shyness, I resemble the son of Alexander the Great. That unfortunate prince could excuse himself from Polysperchon's odious invitation so long as Polysperchon did not urge it in person. Just like me! Send me an invitation to dinner to which I can reply by note or message, and if I wish to say "No," I can say it like a man; but invaded in my own house, or waylaid in the street, clapped on the shoulder, accosted vigorously, with a hypocritical frankness, "Fie, my dear sir — not dine with me? What are you afraid of? Do you think I shall give you the

Digitized by Google

Gladstone claret?" — then Dusopia seizes me at once; I succumb like the son of Alexander. And every man entitled to call himself Shy, would, if similarly pressed, prove as weak as Hercules and I.

Whole communities have been enslaved by Shyness. Plutarch quotes the saying that the people of Asia only submitted to a single despot because they were too bashful to pronounce the word No.

We ourselves, we sturdy English, were seized with that cowardly but well-bred Dusopia on the Restoration of Charles II. We became, all at once, too shy to ask for the smallest of those safeguards against absolute rule, for which we had just before been shedding our life-blood. It seemed so unmannerly to pester that pleasant young prince with the very business which would annoy him the most; it was so much more polite to trust our freedom to a man of such station, as a debt of honour between gentleman and gentleman, than to vulgarise a generous confidence to the mercantile formalities of a legal security. It was Shyness, and nothing else, that made the bashful conquerors in the Great Rebellion so delicately silent about themselves in the welcome they gave to the courteous and elegant exile. In fact, they have no other excuse; they were shy, and they shied away their liberties.

But the difficulty of saying No is not the only characteristic of Shyness, though it is, perhaps, of all characteristics, that which the Shy have most in common.

The shy man *par excellence* — the man inveterately, idiosyncratically shy — is exposed to perils at every

Digitized by Google

angle of his sensitive many-sided conformation. His servants disregard him — he is too shy to tell them of their faults. His very friendships wound him — the very benefits he confers are so awkwardly given that they are resented as injuries. He loses the object of his affection because he is too bashful to woo. He is snapt up by a masculine shrew, who insists upon having him because she foresees she can rule him. As soon as he is married, he is at his wife's mercy — a woman is seldom merciful to the man who is timid.

If he ever shine in a career, it is by sheer merit of so rare an order that it lights up its owner in spite of himself. But whether in the world or in his household, he weaves a solitude round him. He is shy to his very children. His new-born babe stares him out of countenance.

Providence, so mindful of all its creatures, bestows on the shy man two properties for self-defence. The first is dissimulation. As frankness is the very reverse of shyness, so to be uniformly shy is to be habitually secret. The poor wretch does not mean to be deceitful, but he cannot help it. He sometimes astounds those who think they know him best by what appears at the surface to be the blackest perfidy. He suffers annoyances to accumulate without implying by a word that he even feels them, until he can bear them no longer. Then suddenly he absconds, shuts himself up in some inaccessible fortress, and has recourse to his pen, with which, safe at a distance, his shyness corrupts into ferocity. It was but the other day that a shy acquaintance of mine threw his family into consternation, by going off, none knew whither, and sending his lawyer with a deed of separation to the unsuspecting wife,

Digitized by Google

who for ten years had tormented him without provoking a syllable of complaint.

Another safeguard to the shy man, is in the contagion of Shyness that he communicates to others. It is difficult not to feel shy, when brought in contact with the shy. They give you no opening to the business which you wish to transact with them. As Plutarch says, "they will not look you in the face." It seems, while you talk, as if they suspected you to be a pickpocket. Therefore, unconsciously to yourself, but from your natural desire to prove yourself an honest man, you soften in their favour the terms you would otherwise have proposed. Nor is this all: for if they have certain claims to respect, natural or acquired, such as high birth, superior wealth, reputation for learning, sanctity, or genius, their timidity inspires you with awe. You mistake it for pride. The atmosphere around them, if withering to cordial friendship, is equally repellent of intrusive presumption. They take liberties with no one; it would be a monstrous impertinence to take liberties with them. These, unquestionably, are safeguards to a creature otherwise helpless. The self-conservation of bold animals is in boldness; of timid, in timidity.

I have been treating here of the man incorrigibly, permanently shy. But a large proportion of us are shy in early life, and cease to be so as we live on; and many of us remain, to a certain degree, shy to the last, but not so shy as to be emphatically shy.

In youth, our individual position is uncertain and dubious. Be our birth ever so ancient, our fortune ever so large, still our own personal merit remains to be assessed, and a proud or sensitive nature will be

Digitized by Google

desirous of an approbation for something distinct from a pedigree or a rent-roll. Nay, amongst the young, in England especially, Shyness will be found more prevalent with the high-born than the plebeian. The plebeian, who has in him the force and desire to shoulder his own way through the crowd, more often errs by the rude eagerness to combat, than the refining anxiety to please.

Vigorous competition is the best cure for a morbid excess of Shyness. Thus, it is noticeable that the eldest sons of good family are generally more shy than the younger — and probably shy in proportion as they feel within themselves merits distinct from their social advantages, but which they are not compelled to test betimes like their younger brothers. But high rank is in England so generally associated with the discharge of public duties, that if these elder sons be born to pre-eminent stations, their shyness will often wear away, when their faculties are called into exercise by the very inheritance which deprives them of the stimulus of gain, but, bringing them at once before the criticism of public opinion, supplies a motive for coveting public esteem. A great proprietor doubles his influence in his county if he be active or beloved. In the House of Lords itself, a baron and a duke meet foot to foot upon equal terms; and if the baron prove himself the better man of the two, he will be the weightier peer. Thus many a young noble, oppressively shy while he is nothing but a young noble, becomes self-composed and self-confident when he succeeds to his inheritance, and has to show what there is in him, not as noble alone, but as man.

To come back to Plutarch — Shyness has its good

Digitized by Google

qualities, and has only its bad when it is Dusopia in excess. "We must prune it with care," says our philosopher, "so as only to remove the redundant branches, and not injure the stem, which has its root in the generous sensitiveness to shame."

A certain degree of shyness in early life is, indeed, not the invariable, but still the most frequent, concomitant of that desire of esteem which is jealous of honour, or that love of glory which concentres genius on objects worthy of renown.

I grant, indeed, that merit is not always modest. When a man has unmistakably done a something that is meritorious, he must know it; and he cannot in his heart undervalue that something, otherwise he would never have strained all his energies to do it. But till he has done it, it is not sure that he can do it; and if, relying upon what he fancies to be genius, he does not take as much pains as if he were dull, the probability is that he will not do it at all. Therefore merit not proved is modest; it covets approbation, but is not sure that it can win it. And while thus eager for its object, and secretly strengthening all its powers to achieve it by a wise distrust of unproved capacities, and a fervent admiration for the highest models, merit is tremulously shy.

Akin, indeed, with Shyness, more lasting — often as strong in the zenith of a career as at its commencement — is a certain nervous susceptibility, — a perpetual comparison between one's own powers and some ideal standard of excellence which one can never wholly attain, but towards which one is always striving. "Every wyse man," says Roger Ascham, with a meaning not less profound for the paradox that appears

Digitized by Google

on the surface — "every wyse man that wysely would learn anything, shall chiefly go about that whereunto he knoweth well that he shall never come." And the old scholar explains his dogma thus: —

"In every crafte there is a perfect excellency, which may be better known in a man's mind than followed in a man's dede. This perfectnesse, because it is generally layed as a broad wyde example afore all men, no one particular man is able to compasse; and as it is general to all men, so it is perpetual for all time, which proveth it a thing for man impossible, — although not for the capacities of his thinking, which is heavenleye, yet surely for the ability of our workings, which is worldly." And this quaint precursor and foreshadower of the German philosopher's æsthetic archetype, proceeds to argue that this ideal "perfectnesse" prevents despair; "for no man being so perfect but what another may be better, every man may be encouraged to take more pains than his fellows."

Now, I apprehend that the ideal excellence thus admirably described is always present to the contemplation of the highest order of genius, and tends to quicken and perpetuate the nervous susceptibility, which inspires courage while it seems like fear.

Nervousness, to give the susceptibility I speak of its familiar name, is perhaps the quality which great orators have the most in common. I doubt whether there has been any public speaker of the highest order of eloquence who has not felt an anxiety or apprehension, more or less actually painful, before rising to address an audience upon any very important subject on which he has meditated beforehand. This nervousness will, indeed, probably be proportioned to the

Digitized by Google

amount of previous preparation, even though the necessities of reply or the changeful temperament which characterises public assemblies may compel the orator to modify, alter, perhaps wholly reject, what, in previous preparation, he had designed to say. The fact of preparation itself had impressed him with the dignity of the subject — with the responsibilities that devolve on an advocate from whom much is expected, on whose individual utterance results affecting the interests of many may depend. His imagination had been roused and warmed, and there is no imagination where there is no sensibility. Thus the orator had mentally surveyed, as it were, at a distance, the loftiest height of his argument; and now, when he is about to ascend to it, the awe of the altitude is felt.

According to traditions, despite the majestic self-possession Lord Macaulay truly ascribes to the tenor of his life, Mr. Pitt was nervous before rising to speak; hence, perhaps, his recourse to stimulants. A surgeon, eminent in Brighton, some years ago told me that when he was a shopboy in London, he used to bring to Mr. Pitt the dose of laudanum and sal-volatile which the great statesman habitually took before speaking. The laudanum perhaps hurt his constitution more than the port wine, which he drank by the bottle; the wine might be necessary to sustain the physical spirits lowered by the laudanum. Mr. Fox was nervous before speaking; so, I have heard, was Lord Plunket. A distinguished member of the Whig party, now no more, and who was himself one of the most sensitive of men and one of the most attractive of orators, told me that once in the House of Commons he had crossed over to speak to Mr. Canning on some question of

Digitized by Google

public business, a little time before the latter delivered one of his most remarkable speeches; and on taking the hand Mr. Canning extended to him, he exclaimed, "I fear you are ill, your hand is so cold and damp." "Is it?" answered Canning, smiling; "so much the better: that shows how nervous I am; I shall speak well to-night." Mr. Stapylton remarks how perceptible to those familiar with Mr. Canning was the difference in his aspect and manner before and after one of his great orations; and a very clever French writer upon the Art of Oratory compares the anguish (*angoisse*) which oppresses the mind of a public speaker while burdened with the sense of some great truth that he is charged to utter, with the joyous elation of spirit that follows the relief from the load.

The truth is, that nervousness is sympathetic. It imparts a strange magnetic affinity with the audience; it redoubles the orator's attention to the effect he is producing on his audience; it quickens his self-possession, it stimulates his genius, it impresses on those around him a fellow-feeling, for it evinces earnestness, and earnestness is the soul of oratory — the link between the lips of one and the hearts of many. Round an orb that is self-luminous the atmosphere always quivers. When a man does not feel nervous before rising, he may certainly make an excellent sensible speech, but let him not count on realising the higher success which belongs to great orators alone.

In speeches thoroughly impromptu, in which the mind of the speaker has not had leisure to brood over what he is called upon suddenly to say, the nervousness either does not exist or is much less painfully felt; because then the speaker has not set before his

Digitized by Google

imagination some ideal perfection to which he desires to attain, and of which he fears to fall short. And this I take to be the main reason why speakers who so value themselves on readiness that they never revolve beforehand what they can glibly utter, do not rise beyond mediocrity. To no such speaker has posterity accorded the name of orator. The extempore speaker is not an orator, though the orator must of necessity be, whenever occasion calls for it, an extempore speaker. Extemporaneous speaking is, indeed, the groundwork of the orator's art; preparation is the last finish, and the most difficult of all his accomplishments. To learn by heart as a schoolboy, or to prepare as an orator, are two things not only essentially different, but essentially antagonistic to each other; for the work most opposed to an effective oration is an elegant essay.

As with the orator, so, though in a less degree, it is with the writer — indeed, with all intellectual aspirants. The author, whatever he attempts, from an epic to an epigram, should set before his ambition that "perfect excellency which is better known in a man's mind than followed in a man's dede." Aim at the highest, and at least you soar; but the moment you set before yourself an ideal of excellence, you are as subject to diffidence as, according to Roger Ascham, you are freed from despair. Emulation, even in the brutes, is sensitively "nervous." See the tremor of the thoroughbred racer before he starts. The dray-horse does not tremble, but he does not emulate. It is not his work to run a race. Says Marçus Antoninus, "It is all one to a stone whether it be thrown upwards or downwards." Yet the emulation of a man of genius is

Digitized by Google

seldom with his contemporaries, — that is, inwardly in his mind — although outwardly, in his acts, it would seem so. The competitors with whom his secret ambition seeks to vie are the dead. Before his vision rise all the masters of the past in the art to which he devotes his labour. If he forget them to study his contemporaries, he is undone — he becomes a plagiarist. From that which time has made classical we cannot plagiarise. The spirit of our own age compels us to be original, even where we imitate the forms of an age gone by. Molière cannot plagiarise from Terence and Plautus, nor Racine from Euripides, nor Pope from Horace, nor Walter Scott from the old Border Minstrels. Where they imitate they reproduce. But we cannot reproduce what is actually living. We cannot reproduce our contemporaries; we can but copy them if we take them as our models. The desire of excellence is the necessary attribute of those who excel. We work little for a thing unless we wish for it. But we cannot of ourselves estimate the degree of our success in what we strive for — that task is left to others. With the desire for excellence comes, therefore, the desire for approbation. And this distinguishes intellectual excellence from moral excellence; for the latter has no necessity of human tribunal; it is more inclined to shrink from the public than to invite the public to be its judge. To the aspirants to moral good the *vox populi* is not the *vox Dei*. The Capitol has no laurel crowns for their brows; enough for them if they pass over earth unobserved, silently educating themselves for heaven. There are natures so happily constituted that they are moved irresistibly to good by an inborn affinity to goodness; for some souls, like

Digitized by Google

some forms, are born into the world, beautiful, and take as little apparent pains as do beautiful forms to increase or preserve beauty. They have but to maintain health by the way of life most in harmony with their organisation, and their beauty endures to the last; for old age has a beauty of its own, even in the physical form; and the Moral Beautiful gradually becomes venerable without even losing its bloom.

But these natures are exceptions to the ordinary law of our race, which proportions the moral worth of a man, as it does the worth of a work from his hand, to the degree of skilled labour by which he has transformed into new shapes the original raw material. And labour needs motive; and motive implies reward.

To moral excellence there are two rewards, neither of which is bestowed by the loud huzzas of the populace; one within the conscience — one far out of reach, beyond the stars.

But for intellectual excellence, man asks first a test, and next a reward, in the praise of his fellowmen.

Therefore the love of human approbation is at the root of all those sustained labours by which man works out his ideal of intellectual excellence; at least so generally, that we need not care to count the exceptions. During the later stages of a great career, that love of approbation, in a mind well disciplined, often ceases to be perceptible, chiefly because it has become too habitually familiar to retain distinctness. We are, then, as little acutely sensible of the pervading force of the motive, as, while in health, we are sensible of the beats of our pulse and the circulation of our blood. But there it still is, no less; — *there*, in the pulse, in

Digitized by Google

the blood. A cynic or a misanthrope may disown it; but if he have genius, and the genius urge him to address men even in vindication of misanthropy and cynicism, he is inevitably courting the approbation which he pretends to scorn. As Cicero says with quiet irony, "The authors who affect contempt for a name in the world, put their names to the books which they invite the world to read." But to return to my starting-point — The desire of approbation will be accompanied by that nervous susceptibility which, however well disguised, is inseparable from the vibrating oscillation between hope and fear. And this nervousness in things not made mechanically familiar by long practice, will be in proportion to the height of a man's own standard of excellence, and the care with which he measures the difficulties that interpose between a cherished conception and a worthy execution of design.

Out of this nervousness comes the shyness common to all youth, where it aspires to excel and fears to fail.

It follows, from what I have said, that those races are the most active, have accomplished the greatest marvels of energy, and, on the whole, exhibit the highest standard of public honesty in administrative departments, to which the national character of Shyness is generally accorded, distinct from its false counterfeit — Pride.

For the best guarantee for honesty is a constant sense of responsibility, and that sense is rendered lively and acute by a certain anxious diffidence of self — which is — Shyness. And again, it is that diffidence which makes men take pains to win and deserve success — stimulates energy and sustains perseverance.

Digitized by Google

The Turk is proud, not shy; he walks the world, or rather lets the world walk by him, serene in his self-esteem. The Red Indian is proud, not shy; his dignity admits of no Dusopia — is never embarrassed nor taken by surprise. But the Turk and the Red Indian do not improve; and when civilisation approaches them, it is rather to corrupt than enlighten. The British race are shy, to a proverb. And what shore does not bear the stamp of their footstep? What boundary in the regions of intellect has yet satisfied their ardour of progress? Ascham's ideal of perfectness is in the mind of the whole nation.

To desire to do something, not only as well as it can be done, but better than we can do it — to feel to exaggeration all our own natural deficiencies towards the doing of it — to resolve by redoubled energy and perseverance to extract from art whatever may supply those deficiencies in nature; — this is the surest way to become great — this is the character of the English race — this should be the character of an English genius.

But he who thus feels, thus desires, and thus resolves, will keep free from rust those mainsprings of action — the sensibility to shame, and the yearning towards perfection. It is the elasticity of the watch-spring that renders it the essential principle to the mechanism of the watch; but elasticity is only the property of solid bodies to recover, after yielding to pressure, their former shape. The mind which retains to the last youth's quick susceptibility to disgrace and to glory, retains to the last the power to resume the shape that it wore in youth. Cynicism is old at twenty. Impudence has no elasticity. If you care no more

Digitized by Google

than the grasshopper for the favour of gods and the reverence of men, your heart has the age of Tithonus, though your cheek have the bloom of Achilles. But if, even alone in your room or a desert, you could still blush or turn pale at the thought of a stain on your honour — if your crest still could rise, your pulse quicken, at the flash of some noble thought or brave deed — then you have the heart of Achilles, though at the age of Tithonus. There is a certain august shamefacedness — the Romans called it PUDOR — which, under hairs white as snow, preserves the aspect of youth to all personations of honour, of valour, of genius.

Digitized by Google

ESSAY VII.

ON THE MANAGEMENT OF MONEY.

(ADDRESSED CHIEFLY TO THE YOUNG.)

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

ON THE MANAGEMENT OF MONEY.

(ADDRESSED CHIEFLY TO THE YOUNG.)

In a work of fiction I once wrote this sentence, which perhaps may be found, if considered, suggestive of some practical truths, — "Money is character."

In the humbler grades of life, certainly character is money. The man who gives me his labour in return for the wages which the labour is worth, pledges to me something more than his labour — he pledges to me certain qualities of his moral being — such as honesty, sobriety, and diligence. If, in these respects, he maintain his character, he will have my money as long as I want his labour; and, when I want his labour no longer, his character is money's worth to him from somebody else. If, in addition to the moral qualities I have named, he establish a character for other attributes which have their own price in the money market — if he exhibit a superior intelligence, skill, energy, zeal — his labour rises in value. Thus, in the humblest class of life, character is money; and according as the man earns or spends the money, money in turn becomes character.

As money is the most evident power in the world's uses, so the use that he makes of money is often all that the world knows about a man. Is our money

Digitized by Google

gained justly and spent prudently? our character establishes a claim on respect. Is it gained nobly and spent beneficently? our character commands more than respect — it wins a place in that higher sphere of opinion which comprises admiration, gratitude, love. Is money, inherited without merit of ours, lavished recklessly away? our character disperses itself with the spray of the golden shower, — it is not the money alone of which we are spendthrifts. Is money meanly acquired, selfishly hoarded? it is not the money alone of which we are misers; we are starving our own human hearts — depriving them of their natural aliment in the approval and affection of others. We invest the money which we fancy so safe out at compound interest, in the very worst possession a man can purchase — viz., an odious reputation. In fact, the more we look round, the more we shall come to acknowledge that there is no test of a man's character more generally adopted than the way in which his money is managed. Money is a terrible blab; she will betray the secrets of her owner whatever he do to gag her. His virtues will creep out in her whisper — his vices she will cry aloud at the top of her tongue.

But the management of money is an art? True, but that which we call an art means an improvement, and not a deterioration, of a something existent already in nature; and the artist can only succeed in improving his art in proportion as he improves himself in the qualities which the art demands in the artist. Now the management of money is, in much, the management of self. If heaven allotted to each man seven guardian angels, five of them, at least, would be found night and day hovering over his pockets.

Digitized by Google

On the first rule of the art of managing money all preceptors must be agreed. It is told in three words — "Horror of Debt."

Nurse, cherish, never cavil away, the wholesome horror of DEBT. Personal liberty is the paramount essential to human dignity and human happiness. Man hazards the condition, and loses the virtues, of freeman, in proportion as he accustoms his thoughts to view, without anguish and shame, his lapse into the bondage of debtor. Debt is to man what the serpent is to the bird; its eye fascinates, its breath poisons, its coil crushes sinew and bone, its jaw is the pitiless grave. If you mock my illustration, if you sneer at the truth it embodies, give yourself no further trouble to learn how to manage your money. Consider yourself doomed; pass on your way with a jaunty step; the path is facile — paths to Avernus always are. But if, while I write, your heart, true to the instinct of manhood, responds to my words — if you say, "Agreed; that which you call the first rule for the management of money, I hold yet more imperative as the necessity to freedom and the lifespring of probity" — then advance on your way, assured that wherever it wind it must ascend. You see but the temple of Honour; close behind it is the temple of Fortune. You will pass through the one to the other.

"But," sighs the irresolute youth whom the eye of the serpent has already charmed, "it is by no means so easy to keep out of debt as it is to write warnings against getting into it."

Easy to keep out of debt! Certainly not. Nothing in life worth an effort is easy. Do you expect to know the first six books of Euclid by inspiration? Could

Digitized by Google

you get over that problem in the first book, popularly called the Ass's Bridge, without a sigh of fatigue? Can you look back to the rudimentary agonies of the Multiplication Table and the Rule of Three, or *As in præsenti*, or even *Propria quæ maribus*, without a lively reminiscence of the moment in which you fairly gave in, and said, "This is too much for human powers"? Even in things the pleasantest, if we wish to succeed we must toil. We are all Adam's children. Whatever we culture on earth, till we win back our way into Eden, we must earn by the sweat of our brow or the sweat of our brain. Not even the Sybarite was at ease on his rosebed — even for him some labour was needful. No hand save his own could uncrumple the rose-leaf that chafed him. Each object under the sun reflects a difficulty on the earth. "Every hair," says that exquisite Publius Syrus, whose fragments of old verse are worth libraries of modern comedies — "every hair casts its shadow."

But think, O young man! of the object I place before you, and then be ashamed of yourself if you still sigh, "Easy to preach, and not easy to practise." I have no interest in the preaching; your interest is immense in the practice. That object not won, your heart has no peace, and your hearth no security. Your conscience itself leaves a door open night and day to the tempter; — night and day, to the ear of a debtor, steal whispers that prompt to the deeds of a felon. Three years ago you admired the rising success of some — most respectable man. Where is he now? In the dock, — in the jail, — in the hulks? What! that opulent banker, whose plate dazzled princes! or that flourishing clerk, who drove the high-stepping horse to his office? The

Digitized by Google

same. And his crime? Fraud and swindling. What demon could urge so respectable a man to so shameful an act? I know not the name of the demon, but the cause of the crime the wretch tells you himself. Ask him: what is his answer? "I got into debt, — no way to get out of it but the way which I took — to the dock, to the jail, to the hulks!"

Easy to keep out of debt! No, my young friend, it is difficult. Are you rich? The bland tradesman cries, "Pay when you please." Your rents or your father's allowance will not be due for three months; your purse, in the meanwhile, cannot afford you some pleasant vice or some innocent luxury, which to young heirs seems a want; you are about to relinquish the vice or dispense with the luxury: a charming acquaintance, who lives no one knows how, though no one lives better, introduces an amiable creature, sleek as a cat, with paws of velvet hiding claws of steel; his manners are pleasing, his calling — usury. You want the money for three months. Why say three; Your name to a bill for *six* months, and the vice or the luxury is yours the next hour! Certainly the easy thing here is to put your name to the bill. Presto! you are in debt — the demon has you down in his books.

Are you poor? Still your character is yet without stain — and your character is a property on which you can borrow a trifle. But when you borrow on your character, it is your character that you leave in pawn. The property to you is priceless, and the loan that subjects it to be a pledge unredeemed is — a trifle.

Young friend, be thou patrician or plebeian, learn

Digitized by Google

to say No at the first, to thy charming acquaintance. The worst that the "No" can inflict on thee is a privation — a want — always short of starvation. No young man, with the average health of youth, need be in danger of starving. But despite that privation or want, thy youth itself is such riches that there is not a purse-proud old millionaire of sixty who, provided thy good name be unsoiled, would not delightedly change with thee. Be contented! Say No! Keep unscathed the good name, keep out of peril the honour, without which even yon battered old soldier, who is hobbling into his grave on half-pay and a wooden leg, would not change with Achilles.

Here I pause, seemingly to digress, — really to enlarge the scope of my reasoning. In the world, around and without us, there are first principles which defy all philosophy. We may arrive with Newton at the law of gravitation; there we stop. "We inquire no more," says Sir William Hamilton, "although ignorant now as previously of the cause of gravitation."

But man in himself is a world; and in man's moral organisation there are also first principles, on which the more we would dispute the more likely we are to be led astray. All things can be argued upon; and therefore, if we so choose, we may be argued out of all things the best for us. There are some things for men and nations which it is safest never to submit to an argument. I would not, as an Englishman, permit trial by jury, or the right of *habeas corpus*, or the honour of the national flag, or the privilege of asylum to political exiles, to become open questions for the casuists of other lands to refine into ignorant prejudices on the part of my old-fashioned country.

Digitized by Google

So, as a human being, in myself integral and independent — as sovereign in free-will as any state on earth, however numerous its citizens, however imperial its sceptre, — there are certain things which I will not allow to be open questions; I assume them as indispensable to my own completeness of human being. I grant that a great deal may be said against them, as there may be against trial by jury and the honour of our flag; but I have made up my mind to maintain and not to discuss them, not because I doubt that all hostile arguments could be triumphantly answered, but because I may not be such a proficient in casuistry as to be able to satisfy others; and in striving to do so I may unsettle in my own mind the foundations of all that I know to be both the temples and bulwarks of my existence as man. I will not consent to make open questions of aught without which I should think it a mercy if I were hanged as a dog. I have read very subtle arguments against the probabilities that my frame holds a soul — that my present life involves a hereafter. I have read arguments no less subtle against the wisdom, and almost against the existence, of every conceivable virtue. I could quote pages by writers of no mean ability to show that common honesty is a vulgar error. So that, in fact, if I were to deliver up my whole self to the arbitrament of special pleaders, to-day I might be argued into an atheist, and to-morrow into a pickpocket. Therefore, I say to the young man about entering life as a free agent, Whenever you are tempted to do something which you have been brought up by honest parents and teachers to know to be wrong, do not argue about it — you can at least hold your tongue. Without an

Digitized by Google

argument you may commit the fault, repent, and atone it, because you have not frittered away the conviction that you have done wrong, but if you once make the wrong an open question, and consent to argue with perhaps a more practised casuist than yourself — his argument taking part with your temptation — then the chance is that you do more than a wrong thing; that you do wrong upon philosophical system, and will very soon substitute custom for conscience. Never be argued out of your soul, never be argued out of your honour, and never be argued into believing that soul and honour do not run a terrible risk if you limp into life with the load of a debt on your shoulders, and, as the debt grows heavy and heavier, the hiss of some lying fiend in your ear, — "Shake it off; you need not be bankrupt; there is an alternative." — "O heavens! what alternative, say!" and the fiend whispers low, suasive words — for the fiends argue well — suasive words which, put in plain English, mean this, — "Be a cheat; be a swindler."

Shake hands, brave young friend; we are agreed. You consent to have horror of debt. You will abstain, you will pinch, you will work harder, and harder, and harder if needful. You will not slink through the crowd as a debtor.

Now comes the next danger. You will not incur debt for yourself; but you have a friend. Pythias, your friend, your familiar — the man you like best and see most of — says to you, "Damon, be my security — your name to this bill!" Heaven forbid that I should cry out to Damon, "Pythias means to cheat thee — beware!" But I address to Damon this observation, "Pythias asks thee to guarantee that three, six, or

Digitized by Google

twelve months hence he will pay to another man — say to Dionysius — so many pounds sterling." Here your first duty as an honest man is not to Pythias, but to Dionysius. Suppose some accident happen — one of those accidents which however impossible it may seem to your Pythias, constantly happen to the Pythiases of other Damons who draw bills on the bank of Futurity; suppose that the smut or the rain spoil the crops on which Pythias relies — or the cargoes he expects from Marseilles, California, Utopia, go down to the bottomless seas; — Dionysius must come upon you! Can you pay to Dionysius what you pledge yourself to pay to him in spite of those accidents? He thinks those accidents not only possible, but probable, or he would not require your surety, nor charge 20 per cent for his loan; and, therefore, since he clearly doubts Pythias, his real trust is in you. Do you merit the trust? Can you pay the money if Pythias cannot? — and, allowing that you can pay the money, are your other obligations in life such as to warrant that sacrifice to Friendship? If you cannot pay, or if you owe it to others more sacred than Pythias himself — owe it to your parents, your plighted bride or wedded wife, or the children to whom, what, before their birth, was your fortune, has become the trust-money for their provision — not to hazard for Pythias that for which, if lost, not you alone but others must suffer, — then, do not common duty and common honesty forbid you to become surety to Pythias for an obligation which it belongs not to Pythias but to Chance to fulfil? I am the last man to say, "Do not help your friend," if you honourably can. If we have money, we manage it ill when we cannot help a

Digitized by Google

friend at a pinch. But the plain fact is this, Pythias wants money. Can you give it, at whatever stint to yourself, in justice to others? If you can, and you value Pythias more than the money, give the money, and there is an end of it; but if you cannot give the money, don't sign the bill. Do not become what, in rude truth, you do become — a knave and a liar — if you guarantee to do what you know that you cannot do should the guarantee be exacted. He is generous who gives; he who lends may be generous also; but only on one condition — viz., that he can afford to give what he can afford to lend; of the two, therefore, it is safer, friendlier, cheaper, in the long-run, to give than to lend. Give, and you may keep your friend if you lose your money; lend, and the chances are, that you lose your friend if ever you get back your money.

But if you do lend, let it be with the full conviction that the loan is a gift, and count it among the rarest favours of Providence if you be ever repaid. Lend to Pythias on the understanding, — "This is a loan if you can ever repay me. I shall, however, make this provision against the chance of a quarrel between us, that if you cannot repay me, it stands as a gift."

And whatever you lend, let it be your money, and not your name. Money you may get again, and, if not, you may contrive to do without it; name once lost you cannot get again, and, if you can contrive to do without it, you had better never have been born.

With honour, poverty is a Noble; without honour, wealth is a Pauper. Is it not so? Every young man not corrupted says "Yes." It is only some wretched

Digitized by Google

old cynic, no drop of warm blood in his veins, who says, "Life is a boon without honour."

But if a Jew knock at your door, and show you a bill with your name as a promise to pay, and the bill be dishonoured, pray, what becomes of your name?

"My name!" falters Damon; "I am but a surety — go to Pythias."

"Pythias has bolted!"

Pay the bill, Damon, or good-bye to your honour!

Pardon my prolixity; earnestness is apt to be garrulous. *Vixi!* I have lived and known life. And, alas! what careers bright in promise I have seen close in jail or in exile; what talents, profuse in their blossom, die off without coming to fruit; what virtues the manliest rot into vices the meanest — which, when one cried in amazement, "How account for so doleful an end to so fair a commencement?" — solve their whole mystery in this: "Damon never recovered his first fatal error; Damon put his name to a bill by which Pythias promised to pay so and so in three months."

Having settled these essential preliminaries — 1st, Never to borrow where there is a chance, however remote, that you may not be able to repay; 2dly, Never to lend what you are not prepared to give; 3dly, Never to guarantee for another what you cannot fulfil if the other should fail; — you start in life with this great advantage — whatever you have, be it little or much, is your own. Rich or poor, you start as a freeman, resolved to preserve, in your freedom, the noblest condition of your being as man.

Now, fix your eyes steadily on some definite end in the future. Consider well what you chiefly wish

Digitized by Google

to be; then compute at the lowest that which you are by talent, and at the highest that which you can be by labour. Always under-estimate the resources of talent; always put as against you the chances of luck. Then set down on the other side, as against talent defective, against luck adverse, all that which can be placed to the credit of energy, patience, perseverance. These last are infinite; whatever be placed against them is finite; you are on the right side of any system of book-keeping by double-entry, on which a mortal may presume to calculate accounts with Fate.

The finest epithet for genius is that which was applied to Newton's genius, "patient." He who has patience coupled with energy is sure, sooner or later, to obtain the results of genius; he who has genius without patience, and without energy (if indeed such genius be a thing possible), might as well have no genius at all. His works and aims, like the plants of Nature before the Deluge, are characterised by the slightness of their roots.

Fortune is said to be blind, but her favourites never are. Ambition has the eye of the eagle — Prudence that of the lynx; the first looks through the air — the last along the ground.

The man who succeeds above his fellows is the one who, early in life, clearly discerns his object, and towards that object habitually directs his powers. Thus, indeed, even genius itself is but fine observation strengthened by fixity of purpose. Every man who observes vigilantly and resolves steadfastly, grows unconsciously into genius.

Assuming that fortune be your object, let your first efforts be not for wealth, but independence. Whatever

Digitized by Google

be your talents, whatever your prospects, never be tempted to speculate away, on the chance of a palace, that which you need as a provision against the workhouse. Youth is too apt to exclaim, "Aut Cæsar aut nullus." But that saying was only for a Cæsar; and even for him it was not a wise one. To a Cæsar there should have been no *Aut.* Nemesis sighed "Aut nullus," when Cæsar fell at the feet of the marble Pompey.

A daring trader hazards the halter if he says, "Rothschild or nothing;" a philosopher will end as a charlatan if he says, "Aristotle or nothing;" a gentleman who says, "Sir Philip Sydney or nothing," is on the eve of becoming a blackleg. The safe maxim is this, "The highest I can be, but on no account — nullus."

Let your first care be, then, independence. Without pecuniary independence you are not even intellectually free; with independence, even though it be gained through some occupation which you endure as a drudgery, still, out of the twenty-four hours, there will be always some hours for the occupation in which you delight.

This observation applies in fullest force to aspirants in literature. It is my cruel fate to receive no unfrequent communications from youths whose calling is that of the counter, whose tastes are those of Parnassus; and the pith of these unsolicited communications is invariably this: —

"I gain so many shillings a-week by a vulgar and detestable trade; but I have a soul above buttons. Read the MSS. I enclose. Do you not think there is some merit in them? Could I not succeed as an

Digitized by Google

author? I have had disadvantages to encounter — so had Burns! I cannot boast of a scholastic education; I have had very little leisure to educate myself; still," — et cetera, et cetera, all the et cetera involving the same question, — "As I am unfit to be an apprentice, am I not fit to be an author? Not having enough of human intelligence, perseverance, and energy to excel as a hatter, a tailor, a butcher, a baker, may I not be a Walter Scott or a Byron?"

Useless — I solemnly warn all such contingent correspondents as may now be looming ominously among other unwelcome clouds that menace my few holiday hours — useless to apply to me. Be the specimens of genius under difficulties, thus volunteered to my eye, good, bad, or indifferent, my answer, as an honest man, can be only this, "Keep to the calling that assures you a something out of which you may extract independence — until you are independent. Give to that calling all your heart, all your mind. If I were hatter, or tailor, or butcher, or baker, I should resolve to consider my calling the best in the world, and devote to it the best of my powers. Independence once won, then be Byron or Scott if you can."

Independence! independence! the right and the power to follow the bent of your genius without fear of the bailiff and dun, should be your first inflexible aim. To attain independence, so apportion your expenditure as to spend less than you have or you earn. Make this rule imperative. I know of none better. Lay by something every year, if it be but a shilling. A shilling laid by, net and clear from a debt, is a receipt in full for all claims in the past, and you go on with light foot and light heart to the future. "How

Digitized by Google

am I to save and lay by?" saith the author, or any other man of wants more large than his means. The answer is obvious — "If you cannot increase your means, then you must diminish your wants." Every skilled labourer of fair repute can earn enough not to starve, and a surplus beyond that bare sufficiency. Yet many a skilled labourer suffers more from positive privation than the unskilled rural peasant. Why? Because he encourages wants in excess of his means.

A man of £300 a-year, living up to that income, truly complains of poverty; but if he live at the rate of £250 a-year, he is comparatively rich. "Oh," says Gentility, "but I must have this or that, which necessitates the yearly £50 you ask me to save — I must be genteel." Why that must? That certain folks may esteem you? Believe me they esteem you much more for a balance at your banker's than for that silver tea-pot or that mannikin menial in sugar-loaf buttons. "But," says Parental Affection, "I must educate my boy; that £50 saved from my income is the cost of his education." Is it so? Can all the schoolmasters in Europe teach him a nobler lesson than that of a generous thrift, a cheerful and brave self-denial? If the £50 be really the sum which the boy's schooling needs, and you can spare nothing else from your remaining £250, still save and lay by for a year, and during that year let the boy study at home, by seeing how gladly you all are saving for him. Then the next year the schooling is the present which you all — father, mother, and sister — by many slight acts of self-denial, have contrived to make to your boy. And it he be a boy of good heart, a boy such as parents so thoughtful nearly always rear, he will go to

Digitized by Google

his school determined to make up to you for all the privations which he has seen those he loves endure for his sake.

You may tell me that practically it comes to the same thing, for the school goes on, and next year you must equally pinch for the £50. True; but there is this mighty difference, you are a year in advance of the sum; and, the habit of saving thus formed, you may discover something else that will bear a retrenchment. He who has saved for one year finds the security, pleasure, and pride in it a luxury so great that his invention will be quickened to keep it. Lay by! lay by! What makes the capital of nations? Savings: nothing else. Neither nations nor men are safe against fortune, unless they can hit on a system by which they save more than they spend. When that system is once established, at what a ratio capital accumulates! What resources the system gradually develops! In that one maxim is the secret of England's greatness! Do you think it mean to save more than you spend? You do in that what alone gives your country its rank in the universe. The system so grand for an empire cannot be mean for a citizen.

Well, we have now added another rule to the canons prescribed to the Management of Money: — save more than you spend. Whatever your means be, so apportion your wants that your means may exceed them. Every man who earns but ten shillings a-week can do this if he please, whatever he may say to the contrary; for if he can live upon ten shillings a-week, he can live upon nine and elevenpence.

In this rule mark the emphatic distinction between poverty and neediness. Poverty is relative, and there-

Digitized by Google

fore not ignoble; Neediness is a positive degradation. If I have only £100 a-year, I am rich as compared with the majority of my countrymen. If I have £5000 a-year, I may be poor compared with the majority of my associates; and very poor compared to my next-door neighbour. With either of these incomes I am relatively poor or rich; but with either of these incomes I may be positively needy, or positively free from neediness. With the £100 a-year I may need no man's help: I may at least have "my crust of bread and liberty." But with £5000 a-year I may dread a ring at my bell; I may have my tyrannical masters in servants whose wages I cannot pay; my exile may be at the fiat of the first long-suffering man who enters a judgment against me; for the flesh that lies nearest to my heart some Shylock may be dusting his scales and whetting his knife. Nor is this an exaggeration. Some of the neediest men I ever knew have a nominal £5000 a-year. Every man is needy who spends more than he has; no man is needy who spends less. I may so ill manage my money that, with £5000 a-year, I purchase the worst evils of poverty — terror and shame; I may so well manage my money that, with £100 a-year, I purchase the best blessings of wealth — safety and respect. Man is a kingly animal. In every state which does not enslave him, it is not labour which makes him less royally lord of himself — it is fear.

> "Rex est qui metuit nihil,
> Et hoc regnum sibi quisque det."

Money is character — money also is power. I have power not in proportion to the money I spend on myself, but in proportion to the money I can, if I please,

Digitized by Google

give away to another. We feel this as we advance in years. How helpless is an old man who has not a farthing to give or to leave! But be moderately amiable, grateful, and kind, and, though you have neither wife nor child, you will never want a wife's tenderness nor a child's obedience if you have something to leave or to give. This reads like satire; it is sober truth.

But now we arrive at the power of money well managed. You have got money — you have it; and, with it, the heart, and the sense, and the taste to extract from the metal its uses. Talk of the power of knowledge! What can knowledge invent that money cannot purchase? Money, it is true, cannot give you the brain of the philosopher, the eye of the painter, the ear of the musician, nor that inner sixth sense of beauty and truth by which the poet unites, in himself, philosopher, painter, musician; but money can refine and exalt your existence with all that philosopher, painter, musician, poet, accomplish. That which they are your wealth cannot make you; but that which they do is at the command of your wealth. You may collect in your libraries all thoughts which all thinkers have confided to books; your galleries may teem with the treasures of art; the air that you breathe may be vocal with music; better than all, when you summon the Graces they can come to your call in their sweet name of Charities. You can build up asylums for age, and Academies for youth. Pining Merit may spring to hope at your voice, and "Poverty grow cheerful in your sight." Money well managed deserves, indeed, the apotheosis to which she was raised by her Latin adorers; she is *Diva Moneta* — a Goddess.

I have said that he who sets out in life with the

Digitized by Google

resolve to acquire money, should place clearly before him some definite object to which the money is but the means. He thus sweetens privation and dignifies thrift. Money never can be well managed if sought solely through the greed of money for its own sake. In all meanness there is a defect of intellect as well as of heart. And even the cleverness of avarice is but the cunning of imbecility.

The first object connected with money is the security for individual freedom — pecuniary independence. That once gained, whatever is surplus becomes the fair capital for reproductive adventure. Adhere but to this rule in every speculation, however tempting: preserve free from all hazard that which you require to live on without depending upon others.

It is a great motive to economy, a strong safeguard to conduct, and a wonderful stimulant to all mental power, if you can associate your toil for money with some end dear to your affections. I once knew a boy of good parts, but who seemed incorrigibly indolent. His father, a professional man, died suddenly, leaving his widow and son utterly destitute. The widow resolved to continue the education of her boy, however little he had hitherto profited by it — engaged herself as teacher at a school, and devoted her salary to her son. From that moment the boy began to work in good earnest. He saw the value of money in this world; he resolved to requite his mother — to see her once more in a home of her own; he distinguished himself at school; he obtained, at the age of sixteen, an entry in a mercantile house. At the age of twenty his salary enabled him to place his mother in a modest suburban lodging, to which he came home every night.

Digitized by Google

At the age of thirty he was a rich man, and, visiting him at his villa, I admired his gardens. He said to me, simply, "I have no taste for flowers myself, but my mother is passionately fond of them. I date my first step in life from my resolve to find her a home; and the invention in my business to which I owe my rise from a clerk to a partner could never have come into my brain, and been patiently worked out, if, night and day, I had not thought of my mother's delight in flowers."

A common motive with a young man is an honest love for the girl whom he desires to win as his wife. Nay, if no such girl yet has been met on the earth, surely she lives for him in the cloudland of Fancy. Wedlock, and wedlock for love, is the most exquisite hope in the innermost heart of every young man who labours; it is but the profligate idlers who laugh at that sacred ideal. But it is only the peasant or mechanic who has a right to marry on no other capital than that which he takes from nature in sinews and thews. The man whose whole condition of being is in his work from day to day, must still have his helpmate. He finds his helpmate in one who can work like himself if his honest industry fail her. I preach to the day-labourer no cold homilies from political economy. The happiness and morality of the working class necessitate early marriages; and for prudent provision against the chances of illness and death there are benefit clubs and societies, which must stand in lieu of jointure and settlement. But to men of a higher grade in this world's social distinctions, Hymen must generally contrive to make some kind of compromise with Plutus. I grant that your fond Amaryllis

Digitized by Google

would take your arm to the altar, though you have not a coat to your back; but Amaryllis may have parents, who not unreasonably ask, "How, young Strephon, can you maintain our daughter? — and if your death demolish all those castles in the air, which you are now building without brick and mortar, under what roof will she lay her head?"

And suppose that no parents thus unkindly interpose between Amaryllis and you, still it is a poor return to the disinterested love of Amaryllis, to take her, thoughtless child, at her word. Amaryllis proves her unselfish love; prove yours, my friend Strephon. Wait — hope — strive — her ring is on your finger; her picture, though it be but a villanous photograph, hangs by your bedside; her image is safe in the innermost fold of your heart. Wait till you can joyously say, "Come, Amaryllis; Plutus relaxes his frown; here is a home which, if humble, at least is secure; and, if death suddenly snatch me away, here is no castle in air for my widow. Amaryllis shall never live upon alms!"

How your love will deepen and strengthen in that generous delay; and with your love, how your whole nature, mental and moral, will deepen and strengthen! Here, indeed, is an object for climbing the rough paths on to fortune; and here the first friendly opposition of Plutus only serves to place upon surer foundations the blessings promised by Hymen. Constancy in love necessitates patience and perseverance in all efforts for fortune; and, with patience and perseverance, a man of fair average capacities is the master of fortune.

But there are lesser objects than those I have de-

Digitized by Google

fined as the most frequently coveted, which lend a charm to the making of money.

It is a motive to economy, and a dissuasion from many profitless follies, to cherish early in life one favourite hobby, provided the hobby be sound and well-bred.

The taste for books, and the desire to collect them, are no mean tests of a schoolboy's career as man.

One of the most distinguished personages in Europe, showing me his library — which is remarkable for its extent and its quality (it was formed on the principle of including all works that treat, directly or indirectly, on the human mind, and thus necessarily includes almost every book worth reading) — said to me: "Not only this collection, but my social successes in life, I trace back to the first franc I saved from the cake-shop to spend on the book-stall. When I was a young man, and received an invitation to a ball, not being then rich, I calculated what it would cost me in kid gloves and coach-hire, and, refusing the ball, bought a book with the money. The books I bought I read; the books I read influenced my career." Perhaps this eminent person might have thought of the balls thus refused in his early youth when, being still young, he gave his own first ball as prime minister.

But hobbies should be wives, not mistresses. It will not do to have more than one at a time. One hobby leads you out of extravagance; a team of hobbies you cannot drive till you are rich enough to find corn for them all. Few men are rich enough for that.

In the management of money, there are some things we do for show — wisely if we can afford it. Money is station as well as character and power.

Digitized by Google

In matters of show, it is better to have one decided success than fifty expensive failures Better to have one first-rate picture in a modest drawing-room than fifty daubs in a pompous gallery. Better to have one handsome horse in a brougham than four screws in a drag. Better to give one pleasant tea-party than a dozen detestable dinners.

A man of very moderate means can generally afford one effect meant for show, as a requisite of station, which, of its kind, may not be surpassed by a millionaire. Those who set the fashions in London are never the richest people. Good taste is intuitive with some persons, but it may be acquired by all who are observant. In matters of show, good taste is the elementary necessity; after good taste, concentration of purpose. With money as with genius, the wise master of his art says, "There is one thing I can do well; that one thing I will do as well as I can." Money, like genius, is effective in proportion as it is brought to bear on one thing at a time. Money, like genius, may comprehend success in a hundred things — but still, as a rule, one thing at a time; that thing must be completed or relinquished before you turn to another.

For a young man of a gentleman's station and a cadet's income, the only show needed is that which probably pleases himself the most — the effect produced by his own personal appearance. Dress will therefore not unreasonably, and by no means frivolously, demand some of his thoughts and much of his money. To the station of a young aspirant of fashion in the polite world, who is known not to be rich, it matters nothing what he pays for his lodging: he can

Digitized by Google

always give his address at a club or hotel. No one cares how much or how little he pays for his dinner. No fine lady inquires if he calls at her house on foot or in a carriage. But society expects him to dress as much like a gentleman as if he were a young duke; and, fortunately, as young dukes nowadays do not wear gold lace and miniver, this is no unreasonable exaction on the part of society. A gentleman's taste in dress is, upon principle, the avoidance of all things extravagant. It consists in the quiet simplicity of exquisite neatness; but, as the neatness must be a neatness in fashion, employ the best tailor; pay him ready money, and on the whole you will find him the cheapest.

Still, if a young man of the gay world means to do the best that he can for his person, and really does obtain a certain rank or repute should it be only said of him that he is extremely well dressed, he will remember that no man in great capitals, without pre-eminent claims of fortune, birth, or beauty, ever really finds a place in *haut ton* without some cultivation of mind. All the men I have ever known, who have lifted themselves into authority in the inner circles of fashion, have been men of considerable intellectual accomplishment. They have either had wit or humour to a fine degree, or admirably strong sense and judgment, or keen penetration into character; they have been, from qualities far below the surface, either charming or instructive companions.

Mere dandies are but cut flowers in a bouquet — once faded, they can never reblossom. In the drawing-room, as everywhere else, Mind in the long-run prevails. And, O well-booted Achaian! for all those sub-

Digitized by Google

stantial good things which money well managed commands, and which, year after year as you advance in life, you will covet and sigh for, — yon sloven, thick-shoed and with cravat awry — whose mind, as he hurries by the bow-window at White's, sows each fleeting moment with thoughts which grow not blossoms for bouquets but corn-sheaves for garners — will, before he is forty, be far more the fashion than you. He is commanding the time out of which you are fading. And time, O my friend, is money! time wasted can never conduce to money well managed.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

ESSAY VIII

ON RHYTHM IN PROSE, AS CONDUCIVE TO PRECISION AND CLEARNESS.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

ON RHYTHM IN PROSE, AS CONDUCIVE TO PRECISION AND CLEARNESS.

In every good prose-writer there will be found a certain harmony of sentence, which cannot be displaced without injury to his meaning. His own ear has accustomed itself to regular measurements of time, to which his thoughts learn mechanically to regulate their march. And in prose, as in verse, it is the pause, be it long or short, which the mind is compelled to make, in order to accommodate its utterance to the ear, that serves to the completer formation of the ideas conveyed; for words, like waters, would run off to their own waste were it nor for the checks that compress them. Water-pipes can only convey their stream so long as they resist its pressure, and every skilled workman knows that he cannot expect them to last unless he smooth, with care, the material of which they are composed. For reasons of its own, prose has therefore a rhythm of its own.

But by rhythm I do not necessarily mean the monotonous rise and fall of balanced periods, nor the amplification of needless epithets, in order to close the cadence with a Johnsonian chime. Every style has its appropriate music; but without a music of some kind it is not style — it is scribbling. And even when we

Digitized by Google

take those writers of the last century in whom the taste of the present condemns an over-elaborate care for sound, we shall find that the sense which they desire to express, so far from being sacrificed to sound, is rendered with singular distinctness; a merit which may be reasonably ascribed, in great part, to the increased attention with which the mind revolves its ideas, in its effort to harmonise their utterance. For all harmony necessitates method; and the first principle of method is precision.

In some exquisite critical hints on "Eurhythmy," Goethe remarks, "that the best composition in pictures is that which, observing the most delicate laws of harmony, so arranges the objects that they by their position tell their own story." And the rule thus applied to composition in painting, applies no less to composition in literature.

In metaphysical works, the writers most conspicuous for harmony of style are those in whom the meaning is most clear from misconception. Thus Hume, the subtlest of all our metaphysicians, is the one whose theories have been the least obscure to his commentators or disciples; for his theories themselves led him to consult, in "every combination of syllables or letters,"* that euphony which, by pleasing the ear (or, through sympathy, the eye that "runs over the book"), allures the attention of the mind, and, while it increases the lucidity of the author by the deliberation with which he selects his expressions, quickens the intelligence of the reader by the charm that lightens the fatigue of its tension; whereas the meaning of Locke is often made needlessly difficult by the ruggedness of

* Hume, 'Why Utility pleases.'

Digitized by Google

his style, and many of the erroneous deductions which his followers have drawn from his system may be traced to the want of that verbal precision which a due culture of euphony seldom fails to bestow.

Much has been said, with justice, against the peculiar modes of euphony elaborated by Johnson and Gibbon; too pompous and grandiose; too remote from our homely vernacular: granted. But that does not prove the care for euphony to be a fault; it only proves that the modes of euphony favoured by those illustrious writers were too perceptibly artificial to be purely artistic. Yet no critic can say that Johnson and Gibbon are obscure; their meaning is much plainer than that of many a writer who prefers a colloquial diction. Not only in spite of the fault, but because of the fault, we impute to their styles, Johnson and Gibbon are — Johnson and Gibbon. And if you reformed their rhythm to simpler modulations, accordant to your own critical canons, they would no more be Johnson and Gibbon, than Pope and Gray would be Pope and Gray if you reconstructed the "Essay on Man" on the theories of Wordsworth; or, by the ruthless excision of redundant epithets, sought, with Goldsmith, to improve the dirge of the 'Elegy' into the jig of a ballad.

It is not, then, that rhythm should be cultivated only for the sake of embellishment, but also for the sake of perspicuity; the culture of rhythm in prose defeats its own object, and results in obscurity, if it seek to conceal poverty of thought by verbal decorations. Its uses, on the contrary, are designed for severe thinkers, though its charm may be insensibly felt by the most ordinary reader, — its uses are based

Digitized by Google

on the common-sense principle, that the more the mind is compelled to linger on the thought, the more the thought itself is likely to emerge, clear and distinct, in the words which it ultimately selects: so metals, opaque in the mass, are made translucent by the process of solution.

Digitized by Google

ESSAY IX.

ON STYLE AND DICTION.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

ON STYLE AND DICTION.

THERE is a great distinction between the art of style and what the phrenologists call "the organ of language." In Jeremy Taylor, for instance, we are dazzled by the opulent splendour of diction with which the preacher comes in state to our souls. High priest of eloquence, to his sacred tiara the many royalties of genius contribute the richest gems of their crowns. But no teacher of style would recommend as a safe model to his pupil the style of Jeremy Taylor. Still more noticeable are the absolute command, and the exquisite selection, of words in Sir Thomas Browne. Milton himself, in the 'Lycidas' or 'Comus,' has scarcely a more curious felicity of phrase, a more dulcet arrangement of sound, than the 'Essay upon Urn Burial' displays in its musical prose. Yet who would contend that the style of Sir Thomas Browne was that of pure classical English? Attempt to imitate the 'Urn Burial,' and you fall into quaint affectation.

I know not if any of his contemporaries, mighty prose-writers though they were, had, on the whole, so subtle and fine a perception of the various capacities of our language as the author of 'Tristram Shandy.' With what finger — how light and how strong — he flies over the keys of the instrument! What delicate

Digitized by Google

elegance he can extract from words the most colloquial and vulgate; and again, with some word unfamiliar and strange, how abruptly he strikes on the universal chords of laughter. He can play with the massive weights of our language as a juggler plays with his airy balls. In an age when other grand writers were squaring their periods by rule and compass, he flings forth his jocund sentences loose and at random; now up towards the stars, now down into puddles; yet how they shine where they soar, and how lightly rebound when they fall! But I should have small respect for the critic who advised the youthful author to emulate the style of Sterne. Only writers the most practised could safely venture an occasional, restrained, imitation, of his frolicsome zoneless graces.

On the other hand, no praise of Addison's style can exaggerate its merits. Its art is perfectly marvellous. No change of time can render the workmanship obsolete. His style has that nameless urbanity in which we recognise the perfection of manner — courteous, but not courtierlike; so dignified, yet so kindly; so easy, yet so highbred. Its form of English is fixed — a safe and eternal model, of which all imitation pleases — to which all approach is scholarship — like the Latin of the Augustan age. Yet I know not whether we could justly say that Addison possessed a very extensive command of language; certainly not a command equal to that of the writers I have just named. His jewels are admirably set, but they are not of the largest size, nor of the most precious water.

Of Goldsmith we may say much the same. His idea of the beauties compatible with chastity of style was limited, but he realised his own idea with ex-

Digitized by Google

quisite finish of execution. And there is no English writer, Addison alone excepted, to whose lucid periods, always elegant and never effeminate, a young man of genius, desiring to form a style attractive alike to scholars and the populace, should more sedulously devote his days and nights.

But there are standards of heroic achievement which are seldom attained without many bold errors in the trial — errors not incurred by those who are contented with standards of less lofty elevation. We may guess at once where Goldsmith would fail in the rarer beauties of language, when we find him rebuking the muse of Gray for that luxuriance of epithet which made its characteristic embellishment. From a treasury of poetic expression, enriched by a learning as copious as Johnson's, and selected by a taste more comprehensive than Goldsmith's, Gray extracted those jewels of phrase which render his verse original by the inimitable arrangement of its spoils. He is among poets what Cellini is among artists; ornament is less the accessory grace than the essential merit of his designs.

Lord Bolingbroke's Political Essays, and many of his letters in familiar correspondence, are often admirable alike for arrangement of style and richness of language. And his mode of composition is in singular accordance with the nature of his subjects and the dignity of his station. He was a patrician statesman, and in treating of state affairs he speaks with authority, and not as the scribes — "Quodam modo, præ se ferens in dicendo nobilitatem suam."* His irony is majestic, his lamentations are reserved and masculine. His graces of language are those which become an accomplished

* Quintilian, in describing the oratory of Messala.

Digitized by Google

statesman. He is not a poet, and he takes from poets no ornaments obsolete or far-fetched. He assumes to be a man who has brought into active life the love of letters; like the English friend of Rousseau's St. Preux, "he has been conducted to philosophy through the path of the passions." His quotations and his images harmonise with the character he assumes. His similes and illustrations are no wanton enrichments of fancy; they support the argument they adorn — like buttresses which, however relieved with tracery, add an air of solidity to the building against which they lean, and, in leaning, prop. Withal, he has been a man of the world's hard business — a leader of party, a chief among the agencies by which opinion is moulded and action is controlled. And therefore, amidst his natural stateliness, there is an absence of pedantry — a popular and genial elegance. His sentences flow loose as if disdainful of verbal care. Yet throughout all there reigns the senatorial decorum. The folds of the toga are not arranged to show off the breadth of the purple hem; the wearer knows too well that, however the folds may fall, the hem cannot fail to be seen.

Perhaps the charm of Bolingbroke's writings is in some degree caused by the interest which it is impossible to refuse to the peculiarities of his character and the vicissitudes of his life — an interest to which his very errors contribute, as they do to that which the human heart so mournfully yields to the infirmities of genius in Byron or Burns.

In this English Alcibiades, what restless, but what rich vitality! We first behold him, like his Athenian prototype, bounding into life, a beautiful ambitious youth, seizing on notoriety as a substitute for fame;

Digitized by Google

audacious in profligate excess — less, perhaps, from the riot of the senses, than from a wild joy in the scandal which singles him out for talk. Still but a stripling, he soon wrenches himself from so ignoble a corruption of the desire for renown. He disappears from the haunts that had rung with the turbulent follies of a boy — he expends his redundant activity in travel — and learns the current language of Europe to so nice a perfection, that, in later life, Voltaire himself acknowledges obligations to his critical knowledge of French.

He returns to England, enters Parliament at the age of twenty-two, and wins, as it were with a bound, the fame which a free state accords to the citizen in whom it hails the sovereign orator of his time. Nor of his own time alone. So far as we can judge by concurrent testimonies of great weight, Henry St. John was, perhaps, in point of effect upon his audience, the most brilliant and fascinating orator the English Parliament ever knew; Chesterfield, himself amongst the most accomplished of public speakers, and doing full justice to Chatham, to whom he ascribes "eloquence of every kind," still commends Bolingbroke as the ideal model of the perfect orator. And Chatham must have accepted as truthful the traditions of his precursor's eloquence, when he said he would rather win back from oblivion Lord Bolingbroke's unreported speeches than Livy's lost books — an opinion endorsed by the severer taste of a yet higher authority, Chatham's son.

And how soon all this splendour is obscured! Queen Anne dies; and the councillor of Queen Anne is denounced as a traitor to King George. What a scene, for some high-bred novelist, might be laid in the theatre itself, the night in which Bolingbroke vanished from

Digitized by Google

the town he had dazzled and the country he had swayed! The playhouse is crowded; — all eyes turn to one box; — there sits serene the handsome young statesman whom, says Prior, "men respect, and women love" —

Curious tongues whisper — "But what is really the truth? Is there any proof against him? It is said the articles of impeachment are already drawn up; the Whigs are resolved to have his head. Tut, impossible! See how gaily he smiles at this moment! Who has just entered his box? — an express? Tut, only the manager. My lord has bespoken the play for to-morrow night."

The curtain falls — falls darkly on an actor greater than any Burbage or Betterton that ever fretted his hour on the mimic stage. Where behind the scenes has my lord disappeared? He is a fugitive on the sea. Axe and headsman are baffled. Where next does my lord reappear? At the playhouse in Paris. All eyes there, as in London, are fixed on the handsome young statesman. And lo! even there, he is Minister of State — distrusted, melancholy minister of a crownless and timid Pretender! He who gave Europe the Peace of Utrecht — he who had supplied ammunition and arms to Marlborough, is an exile in the Court of the Bourbon, or rather in the mimic court of the Bourbon's pensioner, and plotting a buccaneer's foray on the shores of disdainful England. He has told us himself how soon that episode in his life came to a close; and if the cause he had espoused was a wrong one, we may include his mistake in the general amnesty long ago granted to Jacobites.

And now Alcibiades, in a new phase of multiform

Digitized by Google

genius, affects to be Socrates himself. King George has set a price on his head, and he sits quietly down to show that that head is worth a much higher price than the letterless Guelph has offered for it. From his secluded chateau in France he sends forth that marvellous pamphlet which secured to the silenced orator his rank amongst the highest of contemporaneous writers.*

This was, perhaps, really the happiest period of his life. Then, perhaps, he sincerely felt that august contempt for the gauds of ambition, which he laboured hard, but with imperfect success, to sustain through the length of days yet in store for the passionate would-be Stoic; for then he first knew the calm of a virtuous and genial Home. A very early marriage had proved unfortunate, and the triumphs of his official career had been embittered by domestic dissensions. The death of his first wife, shortly after his exile, allowed him to form nuptials more auspicious. The second Lady Bolingbroke, a Frenchwoman, appears to have been all that his heart had sought elsewhere in vain; accomplished, gentle, cheerful, tenderly devoted to him. To this amiable woman, so far as we know, his fidelity never swerved. With that marriage end all the anecdotes of his daring and lawless gallantry. And out of all the friends whom this once paramount chief of party had rallied round him, whom does he select to negotiate terms for his return to his native shores? What friend but the sweet second self? His trust is placed in the resolute heart and quick woman-wit of the faithful wife. Not the least interesting passage in the romance of his checkered career, is that where the

* The Letter to Sir William Windham.

Digitized by Google

plot of the drama shifts once more into Court comedy. Lady Bolingbroke, baffling all the shrewd arts of Sir Robert Walpole, entrapping the saturnine King with a golden bait set for the German gorgon who ruled him,* hastening back to her lord victorious, as Walpole, an hour too late, comes out of the royal closet foiled and discomfited. The Tories look up. The High Church smooths its band with decorous delight. Woe to Walpole and the Whigs! Lord Bolingbroke,

"The Senate's darling and the Church's pride,"

can return to England.

But Walpole is not so artless a spider as to be destroyed by a wasp, whatever its sting or its nippers. True, the wasp has broken one mesh of the web, but to that hole in the wall, wherein sits the spider despotic, the wasp never shall bring either nippers or sting. Lord Bolingbroke may return to England, but Lord Bolingbroke shall not re-enter the doors of Parliament. The voice of Achilles must not be heard from the ramparts on which his form reappears. Perhaps so signal a compliment was never yet paid to that eloquence by which Euripides tells us great States can be overturned.**

Lord Bolingbroke is now far advanced in middle age, but long years are yet before him. Lost to the Senate,

* The Duchess of Kendal. The price paid to this lady for her good offices is said to have been £11,000. — *Etough Papers.*

** Lord Bolingbroke's pardon passed the Great Seal in 1723. The bill which restored him to his title and estates passed in 1725. (Lady Bolingbroke visited England a second time to negotiate for this object with Lady Harcourt and the Duchess of Kendal.) The attainder was, however, kept up, lest, as Bolingbroke writes, "so corrupt a member should come again into the House of Lords, and his bad leaven should sour that sweet untainted mass."

Digitized by Google

his stately mournful image is seen distinct in the groves of Academe. He is still that "prodigy of parts" for whom the dark misanthropy of Swift softens into reverent affection. He is still that "lord of the silver bow," from whom Pulteney borrows his piercing shafts. He is still that "accomplished St. John," from whom Pope takes the theme and the argument of a poem unequalled in didactic solemnity and splendour, since Lucretius set to music the false creed of Epicurus. No Guelph and no Walpole can interdict genius from fame. But fame alone seldom comforts the man who has trained his mind from youth to the pursuit of power.

Throughout all Bolingbroke's Correspondence, though he seeks with no ignoble simulation to appear serene, his melancholy is intense. To ambition excluded from its fair field of living action, the gardens of philosophy, like those of the Homeric spectre-land, are landscapes without a sun.

But at last the sun itself, so radiant in the morn, so obscured in the noon and evening of his life, breaks faintly forth on eyes it can rejoice no more. Walpole at length has fallen. A new Ministry is formed, to whom the attainted traitor is a patriot martyr. A new generation has arisen, for whom the errors of one whose works have charmed their taste, whose sorrows have moved their hearts, are merged in renown or atoned by penance.

The Prince of Wales selects as his political teacher and councillor the man whose voice had been gagged, lest the throne of the Guelph should reel before the sound of its trumpet-peal. The sun rests upon slopes smoothed to the stride of ambition — if ambition has still heart and strength to renew the journey. But all

Digitized by Google

the old man, weary and worn out, now needs from earth, are six feet of mould never lit by the sun!

The day that he sank into the grave, critics might have predicted to his memory a popular and enduring honour among the names which adorn a nation; for his political faults were those which friends could well contrive to palliate, and foes well afford to excuse. True, he had desired and had schemed to place a Stuart on the throne yet held by a Stuart, and to give to Anne a successor in her brother, rather than in a German prince who could not speak a word of our language, and who has left us no cause to suspect that he ever said a wise or a good thing in his own. We are glad that in this Lord Bolingbroke failed; we can all now acknowledge that the welfare of England was best consulted by the exclusion of the former dynasty. But that Bolingbroke for a few months thought otherwise, is but to say that he thought with perhaps half his countrymen, since Walpole's only excuse for violating the Constitution by the Septennial Act, and suppressing opinion by corrupting its organs, is that, if England could have spoken out, there would have been a cry loud enough to have rent the land in twain, of "God save the King — on the other side of the water!" Bolingbroke's private errors in his earlier years had been long since cancelled by manners unimpeachably pure since the date of his second marriage. All that was before the world in the writings he had published, abounds in maxims as loftily moral as ever, under the Attic Portico, bade the soul take from Virtue an armour invulnerable to the shafts of Fortune. His political tenets were those which the soundest thinkers of this day tacitly adopt. Nothing has ever yet been written

Digitized by Google

more practically wise on the true interest of England in her relations to foreign states, than will be found in the numbers of the 'Occasional Writer,' which treat of "the Balance of Power;" nothing more nobly liberal than the old Tory chief's eloquent plea for the popular principle of Parliamentary representation and the purity of election ever emanated from a Reform Committee. And at the day of his death he was confessedly the finest prose-writer, both in thought and in form, that had yet devoted genius and learning to the warfare of party politics. But all these title-deeds to unquestionable repute he himself destroyed as ruthlessly as the Stuarts he had once served had destroyed their own to a less enviable throne. He had written, in the spleen of compulsory leisure, and at an age when reason was weakened and imagination dulled, a long, tedious, pointless, nerveless essay, or rather bundle of essays, intended to advance the morality of Deism against the religion of Christianity. Pope, in the graceful epigram which compliments Chesterfield, had said —

> "Accept a miracle instead of wit,
> See two dull lines by Stanhope's pencil writ."

But Bolingbroke, in his argument against miracles, is chastised by a phenomenon that might have seemed a miracle in himself. Not two lines, but four thick volumes, are writ by the hand of St. John, in which not one gleam of superior genius is visible from the first page to the last. But perhaps the most singular feature of this poor performance is its extreme irresolution of purpose. In some passages the author lauds Christianity in terms as glowing as a Clarke or a Baxter could have used in its honour. He says, "No

Digitized by Google

religion ever yet appeared in the world whose natural tendency was so much directed to promote the peace and happiness of mankind: if it has had a contrary effect, it has it apparently, not really."—"Christianity is founded on the universal law of nature." — "Christianity, genuine Christianity, is contained in the Gospels — it is the word of God; it requires, therefore, our veneration and a strict conformity to it." Here he only seems about to imply a distinction between the Gospels and the other writings in the New Testament; yet elsewhere he reurges all that deists have ever written against the authenticity of the Gospels as the word of God.

But whatever the sins of Bolingbroke's deistical work, there is no evidence to show that he designed it for publication — much evidence to favour the supposition that he never meant it to be published.

Unfortunately, in his will he bequeathed to David Mallet, the copyright of works, whether published or privately printed, enumerating them by name, and the copy of all his MSS., with the whole of his library.

The deistical essays are not mentioned in the will. It was said by those intimate with Bolingbroke that he had exacted from Mallet a promise that they should not be published. This Mallet denied; but his character for veracity is not unquestionable. Bolingbroke himself, in a letter to Swift, and in allusion to these very essays, or at least to the opinions they embody, not only disclaims the notion of giving them to the public, but expresses himself with the indignation natural to a thoughtful statesman, against the "*esprit fort* — in English, free-thinker" — whom he looks on as "the pest of society, because his endeavours are directed to

Digitized by Google

loosen its bonds," and declares that he not only disowns, "but detests the character." It is probable enough that, as a politician, Bolingbroke would have shunned to publish the principles at which he had arrived as a metaphysician. And certainly such was the opinion of those who knew his mind the best — his relation Lady Harlington, and his friend Lord Cornbury.

The last wrote feelingly and nobly to Mallet, entreating him to suppress certain criticisms of Church History which had appeared in the Letters on History. Mallet refused, and, bent on making the most money he could by his legacy, not only retained those criticisms, but published the MSS. which fastened on his patron's memory the very character that patron had emphatically declared that he not only disowned, but detested.

Dull as this posthumous book unquestionably was, it did not less shock all sects of Christians because uninviting to all classes of readers. The design of the incendiary was sufficiently evident for odium, though it came out, upon trial, that his match was too damp, and his powder too scanty, to enable him to scorch a beam of the building he had meant to burn down. A name which had just before been assoiled from each old reproach, its claims on admiration denied by none, its titles to respect but feebly criticised by ousted placemen, became branded by an attainder more withering than all which can be framed by the wit of lawyers, and signed by the hand of kings. And, naturally enough, Bolingbroke's bitterest revilers now were those who had been his warmest partisans before. He — the boast and pride of the Tories, their most eloquent chief, their most accomplished author — he to send forth from the tomb, over which they had wreathed their pious

Digitized by Google

funereal garlands, a traitor's instruction to the common foe for the downfall of that divine Acropolis, which was at once the temple of their worship and the stronghold of their force! Every story of his boyish excesses was revived; every excuse for his political errors was ignored. And if to this day his very genius is questioned, his very style hypercritically carped at, it is not from what he did in his life, but for what — perhaps against his injunctions — an unscrupulous mercenary did on his behalf, when his ears were closed to the voice of man's judgments.

Horace Walpole — who, with his usual levity, calls Bolingbroke's Metaphysical Divinity "the best of his writings" — says, "As long as there are parsons, he will be ranked with Tindal and Toland. Nay," adds the slighter infidel, with his cynical sneer — "nay, I don't know whether my father won't become a rubric martyr for having been persecuted by him."

We Christians may, however, afford, nowadays, to Bolingbroke at least, the same indulgence we accord to a less harmless offence in Gibbon. Of Gibbon we have expurgated editions for the perusal of families; we need take little pains to expurgate the editions of Bolingbroke of his posthumous work; we defy it to do the least mischief.

But whatever the sins of the man or the defects of the writer, still, for every student of the age in which he stands forth surrounded by all the Muses, there is a fascinating interest in the name of St. John. And in reading his works, that ineffable charm to which I have before referred as their special characteristic, is in some degree heightened by the spell which the author himself holds over us, as he held, in his own

Digitized by Google

day, over minds so acute and so various as those of Pope and of Pulteney, of Chesterfield and of Swift.

Still, the chief element of the charm is in the writing itself. Whatever our interest in the character and life of a man, he could not charm us in his writings if his writings themselves had no charm. Sir Philip Sidney and Sir Walter Raleigh excite a personal interest, deeper, more unqualified, more enduring, and far more general, than that which we give to Bolingbroke. But their writings, though stamped with an equal genius, have not an equal charm. It is a labour to read through the 'Arcadia,' though it abounds with rare beauties of phrase and fancy; or the 'History of the World,' though it has passages matchless for masculine dignity of style. Once in our lives we may perform such task from a pious sense of the reverence due to England's worthies. Few repeat the dutiful but tedious ceremonial. But no lover of beautiful English can ever be contented to read only once 'The Patriot King,' 'The Letter to Sir William Windham,' 'The Reflexions upon Exile.' Let the volume which contains those writings lie on the table amidst the most popular books of the present day, and it will be chosen for the sake of renewed delight by any true man of letters. Or, should the lad fresh from college take it up for the first time, if there be any promise of author or statesman within him, his eye will soon sparkle and his cheek glow.

Burke formed much of his own style from the study of Bolingbroke. Every reader knows that the 'Vindication of Natural Society' was considered a felicitous imitation of Bolingbroke's manner, and on its first appearance ascribed by many to Bolingbroke him-

Digitized by Google

self. Indeed, Warburton has said that Burke never wrote so well as when he emulated Bolingbroke; a saying that, somewhat to my surprise, Dugald Stewart approves, so far as it applies to style.*

And in those maturer writings in which Burke attains a height far beyond the reach of his predecessor, there is still the trace of Bolingbroke's early influence. The periods retain certain peculiarities of musical cadence, a certain mannerism in the conduct of argument, that remind us of the model on which the master has improved. Burke has not only far loftier qualities of mind than Bolingbroke — a knowledge of books, though not of men, more accurate, comprehensive, and profound — a reasoning more subtle, an imagination more splendid — but this superiority in gifts and acquirements is accompanied by an equal superiority over Bolingbroke in the very beauties for which Bolingbroke is most remarkable. He excels him in luxury and pomp of language; he excels him in discipline and art of style. The most sovereign genius will be always that, whether in prose or verse, which unites in the highest degree the faculty of reasoning with the faculty of imagination; the most beautiful writing, either in prose or verse, will be that which unites the logical arrangement that satisfies our reason with the splendour of language that delights our imagination. And it appears to me that, in this felicitous union, we have no prose-writer who is the equal of Burke.**

* "If on other occasions he has soared higher than in his 'Vindication of Natural Society,' he has nowhere else (I speak at present merely of the style of his composition) sustained himself so long upon a steady wing."— Dugald Stewart 'On Taste,' Essay III., chap. IV.

** In thus saying, I am by no means insensible to Burke's occasional blemishes; nor do I deny altogether Dugald Stewart's assertion "that the

Digitized by Google

Burke's command of style is so great, that as by some he was mistaken for Bolingbroke, so by others he has been identified with Junius; though perhaps no style can less resemble another than the loose sweep of Bolingbroke resembles the geometrical precision of Junius. Burke's language is so rich and bold in illustration, in imagery, in variations of rhythmical harmony, that it employs all the resources of poetry, while adhering, with very rare exceptions, to the laws which the ear and the taste assign to the lawful dominion of prose. But his excellence is that of the writer, not of the orator. In reading his speeches, the beauty of their composition will be felt in proportion as we forget that they were composed to be spoken. They are not framed according to the fundamental and necessary principles of effective oratory, but on the rules — which, as I have elsewhere said, are not only differing, but antagonistic — that regulate the method of elaborate essay. The genius of oratory is more irregular and abrupt; it is akin to that of the drama, inasmuch as it does not address men one by one, each in his quiet study, but a miscellaneous audience, which requires to be kept

defect was in his *taste*, which, left to itself, without the guidance of an acknowledged standard of excellence" (Dugald Stewart is referring here to Bolingbroke as that standard), "appears not only to have been warped by some peculiar notions concerning the art of writing, but to have been too wavering and versatile to keep his imagination and his fancy, stimulated as they were by an ostentation of his intellectual riches, and by an ambition of Asiatic ornament, under due control." But there is no writer who has not some faults, and faults of taste are perhaps those the most common to the highest and the lowest order of writers. The taste of Shakespeare and Milton is not always unimpeachable. But it is to the greatest writers that Adam Smith's exclamation applies — "How many great qualities must that writer possess who can thus render his very faults agreeable!" If we desire to find a writer without fault, we must not look for him amongst the greatest writers.

Digitized by Google

always verging towards that point at which attention relieves its pressure by the vent of involuntary applause. To move numbers simultaneously collected, the passions appealed to must be those which all men have most in common; the arguments addressed to reason must be those which, however new or however embellished, can be as quickly apprehended by men of plain sense as by refining casuists or meditative scholars. Elaborate though Cicero's orations are, they are markedly distinct in style from his philosophical prelections. The essayist quietly affirms a proposition; the orator vehemently asks a question. "You say so and so," observes the essayist about to refute an opponent; "Do you mean to tell us so and so?" demands the impassioned orator. The writer asserts that "the excesses of Catiline became at last insupportable even to the patience of the Senate." "How long will you abuse our patience, Catiline?" exclaims the orator. And an orator who could venture to commence an exordium with a burst so audaciously abrupt, needs no other proof to convince a practised public speaker how absolute must have been his command over his audience. What sympathy in them, and what discipline of voice, manner, countenance in himself, were essential for the successful licence of so fiery a burst into the solemnity of formal impeachment!

Oratory, like the Drama, abhors lengthiness; like the Drama it must keep *doing*. It avoids, as frigid, prolonged metaphysical soliloquy. Beauties themselves, if they delay or distract the effect which should be produced on the audience, become blemishes. Burke, from the very depth of his understanding, demands too great a tension of faculties little exercised by men of the world in general, not to create fatigue in an as-

Digitized by Google

sembly which men of the world compose. And his ornaments, which do not seem redundant when read, would appear in speech too artificial for that spontaneous utterance which oratory, even when prepared, must condescend to simulate. Again, Burke wants that easy knowledge of everyday life which is more or less essential to a popular public speaker. For each day upon each question there is a something which the party he represents wishes to have said — a something, which it would have been a rashness to say yesterday, will be a platitude said to-morrow — but said to-day, has a pertinent wisdom that may turn the scales of debate. Now, the true orator, however aiming at immortality, must not neglect the moment; for he who speaks what the moment needs, is eloquent without effort. But Burke knew little of what was said at the clubs, and what it was all-important should be said in Parliament at the right time. And what he might know of such popular common-sense matters, and deign to repeat in his own way, he would so transform in the re-creating process of his glowing intellect, that not one man in a hundred would have muttered, "That's *my* thought — how clearly he puts it!"

We see in this the contrast between Burke and Fox. Fox studies far more diligently than is generally supposed — in the quiet of his bedroom, which he does not leave till noon. But he, then, has his levee of gossiping partisans: he hears all that the town says — all that his party thinks it would be useful to say; and the facts or reflections his mind has already stored are at prompt service for the immediate want. Burke comes to join him just in time for the debate, weary, as he himself complains, of the forenoon's mental labour, and

Digitized by Google

so little in sympathy with the humours and passions of the time and place, that, when he rises to speak, a matter-of-fact partisan plucks him by the coat-tail, with an imploring entreaty to hold his tongue.

That Burke was no popular speaker in Parliament, except upon those rare occasions when all considerations of mere taste give way to the desire to hear what a first-rate intellect has to say upon matters that vitally affect the State, must be ascribed far more to the matter of his speeches than his personal defects as a speaker. It may be very true that he had an untunable voice — a strong brogue — an ungainly gesture; but I think I can cite proof sufficient to show that Burke's *delivery* in spite of its defects, was that of an orator — that is to say, it was a delivery which increased, not diminished, the effect of his matter. Mr. Fox, in the last motion he ever made in the House of Commons, thus, in words which have escaped the notice of those who have discussed the question of Burke's merits as an orator, refers to a speech of Burke's upon the abolition of negro slavery: "It was perhaps the most brilliant and convincing speech ever delivered in this or any other place by a consummate master of eloquence; and of which, I believe, there remains in some publications a report that will convey an inadequate idea of the substance, though it would be impossible to represent the *manner;* — the voice, the gesture, the manner, was not to be described — O, si illum audisse, si illum vidisse!" *

Now, as many must then have been present, by whom Burke's delivery would have been familiarly

* On the Abolition of the Slave Trade, June 10, 1806. Fox's Speeches, vol. VI. p. 662.

Digitized by Google

known, it is clear that a man of Fox's sound taste and sense would never have indulged in a compliment, not only to the matter, but still more emphatically to the *manner* of the departed statesman, had it not been recognised as truthful. If the matter had been really marred by the defects of delivery, Fox's cordial praise would have seemed a malignant irony. In fact, the House of Commons is an audience that is very soon reconciled to mere personal defects. It is the triumph of an impassioned and earnest speaker to overcome all hostile impressions on eye and ear which at first interpose between his mind and his audience. Fox's gesticulation was extravagant and graceless; his articulation, in spite of lengthened practice, was so indistinct, that he himself in one of his latest speeches observes, that no reporter could catch his words with sufficient accuracy for faithful report. Yet I doubt not that, though indistinct in the gallery, he contrived to make himself very intelligible to the House. The late Mr. Sheil had almost every defect which tradition ascribes to Burke; an unmistakable brogue — a voice so shrill that its tones were compared to daggers of splintered glass; while in spite of its shrillness, the ear was laboriously strained to distinguish the sense of the sound that shivered as it struck on the tympanum. His action was that which in itself is most distasteful to an audience that abhors the theatrical; it was theatrical, and theatrical to excess. Yet Sheil was surpassed by none of our time in his immediate effect upon the House of Commons. He dazzled and fascinated an attention always eager, sometimes breathless. If his effects were transient — if the *quality* of the effects was not equal to the degree — it was not

Digitized by Google

because of his voice and gestures. His deficiencies as an orator, whatever they might be, were intellectual; the physical deficiencies he redeemed — they were forgotten while he spoke. But Mr. Sheil's speeches were composed not upon literary but oratorical principles. It was the form in which he cast his thoughts that made him an orator of mark, beyond the standard of his political knowledge and his intellectual capacities — as it was the form in which Burke cast his thoughts that forbade him to gain, save on rare occasions, that sovereign ascendancy over his audience, which, by political knowledge and intellectual capacities, was his unquestionable right. Any young man with the ambition to become a public speaker can test for himself the truth of my remarks. Let him take up one of Pitt's or Fox's speeches on the French Revolution. They are very badly reported, but enough of the original remains to show the mode in which those masters of the art of oratory conducted the argument they severally advanced. Let him declaim aloud, to any circle of listeners, some of the more animated passages in those mutilated harangues; and if he can declaim tolerably well, he will perceive at once that he is speaking as parliamentary orators speak — that the effects require no histrionic skill of delivery; they are palpable — popular; the sense is easily uttered and quickly understood, and will even at this day excite a certain sensation in listeners, because it embodies elementary differences of opinion, and places those differences in the light and the warmth of the broadest day. Let him then try to speak aloud one of those grand essays which are called Burke's Speeches, and he will soon find the difficulty of suiting phraseology so uncollo-

Digitized by Google

quial, and reasoning so refined, to the tone and gesture of a practical debater. They would require a delivery as skilful as that which the more metaphysically thoughtful, or the more abstractedly poetic passages of Shakespeare require in an actor — in order to conciliate the imagination to an involuntary jar upon the reverence with which, in reflective stillness, we have been accustomed to ponder over oracles so subtle, conveyed from penetralia so remote. It is the same with many famous works in didactic or moralising poetry, which a person of ordinary refinement will peruse, when alone, with pleasure, but which become wearisome when read aloud; whereas other works akin to the drama, and therefore to oratory, may please and impress more when spoken than they do when perused in the closet. The 'Death of Marmion,' or 'Lord Ullin's Daughter,' almost requires to be recited in order to be fully appreciated. But who would wish to hear *recited* the 'Excursion,' or the 'Essay on Man'?

It is more than doubtful whether Burke himself ever spoke his speeches as they are now printed. They were carefully revised for publication, and revised in order to be perfect literary compositions — filed from the roughness, and elaborated from the haste, of oral utterance; and, therefore, it is as literary compositions that they seem to me to deserve our reverential praise and requite our impassioned study — models, as nobly instructive to the young writer, as they would be fatally injurious to the young orator.

To close these remarks, it is according to the nature of the author's work that we should more or less give the preference to richness of language, or to concinnity of style.

Digitized by Google

In writings that treat of the ordinary business of life, or seek to explain rather than suggest, symbolise, or depict, some selected truth, we naturally prefer a style compact and lucid, dispensing with a pomp of words which would be an ostentation impertinent to the simplicity of the occasion. On the other hand, in those classes of composition which are more or less generic to poetry, inasmuch as they are chiefly addressed to the imagination, and through the imagination wind their way to the reason, a style of architectural structure, with all its proportions measured by an inch scale, would be destructive to the effects which the writer desires to produce. To enlist the imagination on your side, you must leave it free to imagine for itself.

When we want practically to build a dwelling-house, let the builder show us his plan in plain geometrical outlines. We suspect that there is something wrong in his construction, that there is some defect which he desires to conceal, when he adds to his drawing the hues of a sunset, or dips the unsightly office-wing into the pleasant gloom of an imaginary grove. But when we wish rather to see on the canvas some ancient legendary castle, some illustration of scenes which heroes have trodden or poets have sung, then we willingly lend ourselves to the beautifying art by which the painter harmonises reality to our own idealising preconceptions; then the thunder-cloud may rest upon the ruined battlements, then the moonlight may stream through the gaping fissures, or, then, the landscapes of Spenser's Fairyland may take a Nature of their own, never seen on earth, yet faithful to our dreams, as they rise from the pallet of Turner in the glory of golden haze.

Digitized by Google

Thus, in the literature of romance, we must admit to creative prose a licence analogous to that which we accord to creative verse. For Romance, though its form be in prose, does in substance belong to poetry, obey the same conditions, and necessitate the same indulgence.

Nor is it in fiction alone (wherein audacity in the resources of poetic diction is obviously proportioned to the degree in which that fiction approaches, or recedes from, the poetic aspects of life) that we are compelled to relax severe canons as to the mechanism of style, if we would leave free play to the higher delight derivable from luxury and glow of language. There are subjects which can only be rescued from triteness, by showing those more latent phases of the Material that rest half-hid amid types and parables of the Spiritual. When Jeremy Taylor discourses on Marriage, what new and endearing light the preacher throws upon the sacred mystery of the indissoluble bond, by words and images that exact from our taste the licence it accords to the poet! And there is many a truth — whether found hourly by the side of crowded thoroughfares, or in shadowy dingles and forest-deeps, unpenetrated by the star — which we may enable science to classify more accurately, and the common reader to comprehend more plainly, if, instead of dry speculation on its botanical attributes, we place in our page the form and the colours of the flower.

Nor, where the imagination of the author has wealth sufficient to render display an appropriate evidence of riches, and not the artifice of the impostor seeking to disguise his poverty, need we fear that the substance of good sense will be slighter for the delicate arabesques,

Digitized by Google

which may give to a thing of use the additional value of a work of art. On the contrary, the elegance of the ornament not unfrequently attests the stoutness of the fabric. Only into their most durable tissues did the Genoese embroiderers weave their delicate threads of gold; only on their hardest steel did the smiths of Milan damaskeen the gracious phantasies which still keep their armour among the heirlooms of royal halls, and guide the eye of the craftsman to numberless fresh applications of former art, though the armour itself be worn no more. The Useful passes away with each generation into new uses. The Beautiful remains a fixed unalterable standard of value, by which the Useful itself is compelled to calculate the worth of its daily labours.

Digitized by Google

ESSAY X.

HINTS ON MENTAL CULTURE

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

HINTS ON MENTAL CULTURE.

In the high-wrought state of civilisation at which we are arrived, few complaints are more common than that of a brain overworked. This complaint is not confined to authors and students; it extends to all who strive for name or fortune against eager and numerous competitors. The politician, the professional man, the merchant, the speculator — all must experience that strain of special faculties in the direction towards special objects, out of which comes nervous exhaustion, with the maladies consequent on over-stimulus and prolonged fatigue. Horace is a sound pathologist, when he tells us that, after Prometheus had stolen fire from heaven, a cohort of fevers, unknown before, encamped themselves on earth. In our audacious age we are always stealing new fire, and swelling the cohort of fevers with new recruits. The weary descendant of Iapetus droops at last — the stolen fire begins to burn low — the watchful cohort pounces on its prey. The doctor is summoned, hears the case, notes the symptoms, and prescribes — repose.

But repose is not always possible. The patient cannot stop in the midst of his career — in the thick of his schemes. Or, supposing that he rush off to snatch a nominal holiday from toil, he cannot leave Thought

Digitized by Google

behind him. Thought, like Care, mounts the steed and climbs the bark.

A brain habitually active will not be ordered to rest. It is not like the inanimate glebe of a farm, which, when exhausted, you restore by the simple precept, "Let it lie fallow." A mind once cultivated will not lie fallow for half an hour. If a patient, habituated to reflection, has nothing else to meditate, his intellect and fancy will muse exclusively over his own ailments; — Muse over a finger-ache, and engender a gangrene. What, then, should be done? Change the occupation, vary the culture, call new organs into play; restore the equilibrium deranged in overweighting one scale by weights thrown into another.

In therapeutic gymnastics, we strengthen one set of muscles hitherto little called into play, in order to correct the tendencies to a malady which the fatigue of another set of muscles has induced. What is thus good for the bodily health, I hold to be yet more good for the whole mental development of man. Mrs. Somerville has written a charming and popular book on 'The Connection of the Sciences;' but it is not only the sciences which have a family kinship; all the faculties and all the acquisitions of the human intellect are relations to each other: — The true chief of a clan never disowns remote affinities; the wider his clanship the greater his power: so it is with a true genius; the more numerous its clansmen, the higher its dignity of chief. If there be some one specialty in art, literature, science, active life, in which we can best succeed, that specialty is improved and enriched by all the contributions obtainable from other departments of study. Read the treatises on Oratory, and you stand aghast

Digitized by Google

at the wondrous amount of information which the critical authorities assure you is necessary for the accomplishment of a perfect orator. But you may say that, according to the proverb, the orator is made; the poet is born. Read, then, the works of any really first-rate poet, and you will acknowledge that there was never a more delusive lie than that which the proverb instils into the credulous ears of poetasters. It is the astonishing accumulation of ideas, certainly not inborn, but acquired alone through experience and study, which makes the most prominent characteristic of a first-rate poet. His knowledge of things, apart from the mere form of poetry, strikes you more than his melodies as a poet. Surely it is so with Homer, Lucretius, Virgil, Horace, Dante, Shakespeare, Milton, Goethe, Scott. Certainly it need not always with the poet be knowledge of books, but it is knowledge of man or of nature, only to be obtained by exerting organs of mind wholly distinct from those which are required to fabricate a rhythm and invent an expression. Whatever our intellectual calling, no kind of knowledge is antagonistic to it. All varieties of knowledge blend with, harmonise, enrich the one kind of knowledge to which we attach our reputation.

Frequently we meet with a writer who achieves one remarkable book, and whatever other books he writes are comparative failures — echoes of the same thought, repetitions of the same creations. The reason of that stint of invention is obvious; the author has embodied certain ideas long meditated; and if his book be really great, all the best of those ideas are poured into it. In the interval between that book and the next, he has not paused to ponder new studies and

Digitized by Google

gather from them new ideas, and the succeeding books comprise but the leavings of the old ideas.

A man of genius is inexhaustible only in proportion as he is always renourishing his genius. Both in mind and body, where nourishment ceases vitality fails.

To sail round the world, you must put in at many harbours, if not for rest, at least for supplies.

To any young author of promise, in the commencement of his career, my advice is this, Till you have succeeded in working out your conception, persevere in that one conception; work it out. When you have succeeded — exhausting the best ideas that went to its completion — take care not to repeat the same experiment. Adventure some experiment wholly new; but before you so adventure, be sure that you have taken in wholly new ideas.

The wider your range of thought, the greater your chance and choice of original combinations.

The writer who adopts this counsel is vulgarly called "versatile." That is a misnomer. It is not that Genius is versatile because the objects within its scope are various. If you have twenty thousand a-year instead of one thousand, you are not versatile because you do a great many things which a man of a thousand a-year cannot do.

According to the axioms in optics, "we see everything by means of the rays of light which proceed from it." The eye is not versatile because it is sensible to the rays of light from more things than one.

Again, in optics, "we see everything in the direction of that line in which the rays approach the eye last." Genius is not versatile because in the sweep of

Digitized by Google

its swift survey it sees each thing in the direction of the line in which the rays approach last to its view.

He who is always observant will be always various.

But in my recommendation to seek less in repose of thought (which is scarcely possible to the thoughtful) than in change of the objects of thought (which to all thinkers is possible), the safety from over-fatigue and exhaustion, mental and bodily, I do not address only the children of Genius, who will take their own way, with small heed of what critics may say to them — I appeal to all sober mortals who, whatever their career or their calling, wish to make the most of themselves in this multiform trial of life.

We are not sent here to do merely some one thing, which we can scarcely suppose that we shall be required to do again, when, crossing the Styx, we find ourselves in eternity. Whether I am a painter, a sculptor, a poet, a romance-writer, an essayist, a politician, a lawyer, a merchant, a hatter, a tailor, a mechanic at factory or loom, — it is certainly much for me in this life to do the one thing I profess to do as well as I can. But when I have done that, and that thing alone, nothing more, where is my profit in the life to come? I do not believe that I shall be asked to paint pictures, carve statues, write odes, trade at Exchange, make hats or coats, or manufacture pins and cotton prints, when I am in the Empyrean. Whether I be the grandest genius on earth in a single thing, and that single thing earthy — or the poor peasant who, behind his plough, whistles for want of thought, — I strongly suspect it will be all one when I pass to the Competitive Examination — yonder! On the other side of the grave a Raffaelle's occupation may

Digitized by Google

be gone as well as a ploughman's. This world is a school for the education not of a faculty, but of a man. Just as in the body, if I resolve to be a rower, and only a rower, the chances are that I shall have, indeed, strong arms, but weak legs, and be stricken with blindness from the glare of the water; so in the mind, if I care but for one exercise, and do not consult the health of the mind altogether, I may, like George Morland, be a wonderful painter of pigs and pig-sties, but in all else, as a human being, be below contempt — an ignoramus and a drunkard!

We men are not fragments — we are wholes; we are not types of single qualities — we are realities of mixed, various, countless combinations.

Therefore I say to each man, "As far as you can — partly for excellence in your special mental calling, principally for completion of your end in existence — strive, while improving your one talent, to enrich your whole capital as Man. It is in this way that you escape from that wretched narrow-mindedness which is the characteristic of every one who cultivates his specialty alone: Take any specialty; dine with a distinguished member of Parliament — the other guests all members of Parliament except yourself — you go away shrugging your shoulders. All the talk has been that of men who seem to think that there is nothing in life worth talking about but the party squabbles and jealousies of the House of Commons. Go and dine next day with an eminent author — all the guests authors except yourself. As the wine circulates, the talk narrows to the last publications, with, now and then, on the part of the least successful author present, a refining eulogium on some dead writer, in implied dis-

Digitized by Google

paragement of some living rival. He wants to depreciate Dickens, and therefore he extols Fielding. If Fielding were alive and Dickens were dead, how he would extol Dickens! Go, the third day; dine with a trader — all the other guests being gentlemen on the Stock Exchange. A new specialty is before you; all the world seems circumscribed to scrip and the budget. In fine, whatever the calling, let men only cultivate that calling, and they are as narrow-minded as the Chinese when they place on the map of the world the Celestial Empire, with all its Tartaric villages in full detail, and out of that limit make dots and lines, with the superscription, "Deserts unknown, inhabited by barbarians!"

Nevertheless, you are not wise, if, dining with any such hosts, you do not carry away from the talk you have heard something of value that you could not otherwise have gained. The circle of life is cut up into segments. All lines are equal if they are drawn from the centre and touch the circumference.

Every man of sound brain whom you meet, knows something worth knowing better than yourself. A man, on the whole, is a better preceptor than a book. But what scholar does not allow that the dullest book can suggest to him a new and a sound idea? Take a dull man and a dull book; if you have any brains of your own, the dull man is more instructive than the dull book. Take a great book, and its great author; how immeasurably above his book is the author, if you can coax him to confide his mind to you, and let himself out!

What would you not give to have an hour's frank talk with Shakespeare — if Shakespeare were now liv-

Digitized by Google

ing? You cannot think of yourself so poorly as not to feel sure that, at the end of the hour, you would have got something out of him which fifty years' study would not suffice to let you get out of his plays. Goldsmith was said by Garrick to "write like an angel and talk like poor Poll." But what does that prove? — nothing more than this, that the player could not fathom the poet. A man who writes like an angel cannot always talk like poor Poll. That Goldsmith, in his peach-coloured coat, awed by a Johnson, bullied by a Boswell, talked very foolishly, I can well understand; but let any gentle reader of human brains and human hearts have got Goldsmith all to himself over a bottle of madeira, in Goldsmith's own lodging — talked to Goldsmith lovingly and reverentially about "The Traveller" and "The Vicar of Wakefield," and sure I am that he would have gone away with the conviction that there was something in the wellspring of so much genius more marvellous than its diamond-like spray — something in poor Oliver Goldsmith immeasurably greater than those faint and fragmentary expressions of the man which yet survive in the exquisite poem, in the incomparable novel.

I remember being told by a personage who was both a very popular writer and a very brilliant converser, that the poet Campbell reminded him of Goldsmith — his conversation was so inferior to his fame. I could not deny it; for I had often met Campbell in general society, and his talk had disappointed me. Three days afterwards, Campbell asked me to come and sup with him *tête-à-tête*. I did so. I went at ten o'clock. I stayed till dawn; and all my recollections of the most sparkling talk I have ever heard in drawing-rooms,

Digitized by Google

afford nothing to equal the riotous affluence of wit, of humour, of fancy, of genius, that the great lyrist poured forth in his wondrous monologue. Monologue it was; he had it all to himself.

If the whole be greater than a part, a whole man must be greater than that part of him which is found in a book.

As we vary our study in books, so we should vary our study in men. Among our friends and associates we should have some whose pursuits differ from our own. Nothing more conduces to liberality of judgment than facile intercourse with various minds. The commerce of intellect loves distant shores. The small retail dealer trades only with his neighbour; when the great merchant trades, he links the four quarters of the globe. Above all, maintain acquaintanceship with those who represent the common sense of the time in which you live. "It is a great thing," said Goethe, "to have something in common with the commonalty of men." We should know little of our age if we lived only with sages. On the other hand, we should never be above our age if we did not now and then listen to sages.

This is a busy world; never deem yourself superior to what Bacon calls "the wisdom of business." If your pursuits take you somewhat aside from the practical affairs of life — if you are a poet, a scholar, an artist — it is the more necessary that you should keep yourself wide awake when you deal with a tradesman or look into your accounts; for it is a popular notion that poets, scholars, and artists can be very easily cheated; and therefore more people try to cheat them than they do ordinary mortals. Even among the

Digitized by Google

inferior races, the more a creature is likely to be preyed upon, the more wary and vigilant Nature designs it to be. Poet, before you sit down to surpass "Paradise Lost," be sure that you know the market price of mutton; you may not surpass "Paradise Lost," but you will certainly have to pay for your mutton! Politician, before you devote yourself to your country with the ambition to excel Mr. Pitt, see that your servants don't cheat you; they cheated Mr. Pitt, and, in cheating him, made one of those few dread humiliations of his august life which brought tears to his proud eyes, but no amendment in his weekly bills. Perhaps the only thing in which, O politician! you may resemble Mr. Pitt, is, that your servants may cheat you; and if you are not Mr. Pitt, no friends will come forward to humble you by paying your debts. Poet or politician, the more you labour for immortality, be the more on your guard that your mortal career do not close in the Queen's Bench! but especially if you be a professional man of letters, living on the profits of your pen, let your publisher know that you are as punctual and scrupulous in the fulfilment of engagements as if he were dealing with a formal clerk in the City. No genius can afford to dispense with loyalty and honour. Loyalty and honour necessitate the attention to business. Every man to whom you make a promise that you will do such and such work in a certain time, should rest assured that your word is as firm as the Rock of Gibraltar. Confidence is the first principle of all business.

It is a wondrous advantage to a man, in every pursuit or avocation, to secure an adviser in a sensible woman. In woman there is at once a subtle delicacy

Digitized by Google

of tact, and a plain soundness of judgment, which are rarely combined to an equal degree in man. A woman, if she be really your friend, will have a sensitive regard for your character, honour, repute. She will seldom counsel you to do a shabby thing, for a woman-friend always desires to be proud of you. At the same time, her constitutional timidity makes her more cautious than your male friend. She, therefore, seldom counsels you to do an imprudent thing. By female friendships I mean pure friendships — those in which there is no admixture of the passion of love, except in the married state. A man's best female friend is a wife of good sense and good heart, whom he loves, and who loves him. If he have that, he need not seek elsewhere. But supposing the man to be without such helpmate, female friendships he must still have, or his intellect will be without a garden, and there will be many an unheeded gap even in its strongest fence. Better and safer, of course, such friendships where disparities of years or circumstances put the idea of love out of the question. Middle life has rarely this advantage; youth and old age have. We may have female friendships with those much older, and those much younger, than ourselves. Molière's old housekeeper was a great help to his genius; and Montaigne's philosophy takes both a gentler and a loftier character of wisdom from the date in which he finds, in Marie de Gournay, an adopted daughter, "certainly beloved by me," says the Horace of essayists, "with more than paternal love, and involved in my solitude and retirement, as one of the best parts of my being." Female friendship, indeed, is to man "præsidium et dulce decus" — the bulwark and sweet ornament of his existence. To his mental

Digitized by Google

culture it is invaluable; without it all his knowledge of books will never give him knowledge of the world.

In science, read, by preference, the newest works; in literature, the oldest. The classic literature is always modern. New books revive and re-decorate old ideas; old books suggest and invigorate new ideas.

It is a great preservative to a high standard in taste and achievement, to take every year some one great book as an especial study, not only to be read, but to be conned, studied, brooded over; to go into the country with it, travel with it, be devotedly faithful to it, be without any other book for the time; compel yourself thus to read it again and again. Who can be dull enough to pass long days in the intimate, close, familiar intercourse with some transcendent mind, and not feel the benefit of it when he returns to the common world?

But whatever standard of mental excellence you thus form in your study of the Excellent, never, if you wish to be wise, let your standard make you intolerant to any other defects but your own. The surest sign of wisdom is charity; and the best charity is that which never ostentatiously parades itself as charity. For your idea of man as he ought to be, always look upward; but to judge aright man as he is, never affect to stoop. Look your fellow-man straight in the face. Learn all you possibly can; and when you have learned that all, I repeat it, you will never converse with any man of sound brain who does not know something worth knowing better than yourself.

Sir Walter Scott, in a letter to Joanna Baillie, says: "I never heard of a stranger that utterly baffled

Digitized by Google

all efforts to engage him in conversation except one, whom an acquaintance of mine met in a stage-coach. My friend,* who piqued himself on his talents for conversation, assailed this tortoise on all hands, but in vain; and at length descended to expostulation.

"'I have talked to you, my friend, on all the ruling subjects, — literature, farming, merchandise, gaming, game-laws, horse-races, suits at law, politics, and swindling, and blasphemy, and philosophy — is there any one subject that you will favour me by opening upon?' The wight writhed his countenance into a grin. 'Sir,' said he, 'can you say anything clever about bend-leather?'

"There," says Sir Walter, "I own I should have been as much nonplussed as my acquaintance."

I venture to doubt that modest assertion. Sir Walter would have perceived that he had not there to teach, but to learn; and I am quite certain that before the end of the journey, he would have extracted from the traveller all that the traveller could have told him about bend-leather. And if Sir Walter had learned all about bend-leather — what then? What then? It would have been sure to have come out in one of his books, suggested some felicity in humour, or sported into some playful novelty in character, which would have made the whole reading world merrier and wiser.

It is not knowledge that constitutes the difference between the man who adds to the uses and embellishments of life, and the man who leaves the world just as he found it. The difference between the two consists in the reproduction of knowledge — in the degree

* This friend was Mr. William Clerk.

Digitized by Google

to which the mind appropriates, tests, experimentalises on, all the waifs of idea which are borne to it from the minds of others.

A certain nobleman, very proud of the extent and beauty of his pleasure-grounds, chancing one day to call on a small squire, whose garden might cover about half an acre, was greatly struck with the brilliant colours of his neighbour's flowers. "Ay, my Lord, the flowers are well enough," said the squire, "but permit me to show you my grapes." Conducted into an old-fashioned little greenhouse, which served as a vinery, my Lord gazed, with mortification and envy, on grapes twice as fine as his own. "My dear friend," said my Lord, "you have a jewel of a gardener; let me see him!" The gardener was called — the single gardener — a simple-looking young man under thirty. "Accept my compliments on your flower-beds and your grapes," said my Lord, "and tell me, if you can, why your flowers are so much brighter than mine, and your grapes so much finer. You must have studied horticulture profoundly." "Please your Lordship," said the man, "I have not had the advantage of much education; I ben't no scholar; but as to the flowers and the vines, the secret as to treating them just came to me, you see, by chance."

"By chance? explain."

"Well, my Lord, three years ago, master sent me to Lunnon on business of his'n; and it came on to rain, and I took shelter in a mews, you see."

"Yes; you took shelter in a mews; — what then?"

"And there were two gentlemen taking shelter too; and they were talking to each other about charcoal."

Digitized by Google

"About charcoal? — go on."

"And one said that it had done a deal o' good in many cases of sickness, and specially in the first stage of the cholera, and I took a note on my mind of that, because we'd had the cholera in our village the year afore. And I guessed the two gentlemen were doctors, and knew what they were talking about."

"I daresay they did; but flowers and vines don't have the cholera, do they?"

"No, my Lord; but they have complaints of their own; and one of the gentlemen went on to say that charcoal had a special good effect upon all vegetable life, and told a story of a vinedresser, in Germany, I think, who had made a very sickly poor vineyard one of the best in all those parts, simply by charcoal-dressings. So I naturally pricked up my ears at that, for our vines were in so bad a way that master thought of doing away with them altogether. 'Ay,' said the other gentleman, 'and see how a little sprinkling of charcoal will brighten up a flower-bed.'"

"The rain was now over, and the gentlemen left the mews; and I thought, 'Well, but before I try the charcoal upon my plants, I'd best make some inquiry of them as aren't doctors, but gardeners;' so I went to our nurseryman, who has a deal of book-learning, and I asked him if he'd ever heard of charcoal-dressing being good for vines, and he said he had read in a book that it was so, but had never tried it. He kindly lent me the book, which was translated from some forren one. And, after I had picked out of it all I could, I tried the charcoal in the way the book told me to try it; and that's how the grapes and the flower-beds came to please you, my Lord. It was a

Digitized by Google

lucky chance that ever I heard those gentlemen talking in the mews, please your Lordship."

"Chance happens to all," answered the peer, sententiously; "but to turn chance to account is the gift of few."

His Lordship, returning home, gazed gloomily on the hues of his vast parterres; he visited his vineries, and scowled at the clusters; he summoned his head gardener — a gentleman of the highest repute for science, and who never spoke of a cowslip except by its name in Latin. To this learned personage my Lord communicated what he had heard and seen of the benignant effects of charcoal, and produced in proof a magnificent bunch of grapes, which he had brought from the squire's.

"My Lord," said the gardener, scarcely glancing at the grapes, "Squire ——'s gardener must be a poor ignorant creature to fancy he had discovered a secret in what is so very well known to every professed horticulturist. Professor Liebig, my Lord, has treated of the good effect of charcoal-dressing to vines especially; and it is to be explained on these chemical principles" — therewith the wise man entered into a profound dissertation, of which his Lordship did not understand a word.

"Well, then," said the peer, cutting short the harangue, "since you know so well that charcoal-dressing is good for vines and flowers, have you ever tried it on mine?"

"I can't say I have, my Lord; it did not chance to come into my head."

"Nay," replied the peer, "chance put it into your head, but thought never took it out of your head."

Digitized by Google

My Lord, who, if he did not know much about horticulture, was a good judge of mankind, dismissed the man of learning; and, with many apologies for seeking to rob his neighbour of such a treasure, asked the squire to transfer to his service the man of genius. The squire, who thought that now the charcoal had been once discovered, any new gardener could apply it as well as the old one, was too happy to oblige my Lord, and advance the fortunes of an honest fellow born in his village. His Lordship knew very well that a man who makes good use of the ideas received through chance, will make a still better use of ideas received through study. He took some kind, but not altogether unselfish, pains with the training and education of the man of genius whom he had gained to his service. The man is now my Lord's head forester and bailiff. The woods thrive under him, the farm pays largely. He and my Lord are both the richer for the connection between them. He is not the less practically painstaking, though he no longer says "ben't" and "his'n;" nor the less felicitously theoretical, though he no longer ascribes a successful experiment to chance.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

ESSAY XI.

ON THE MORAL EFFECT OF WRITERS.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

ON THE MORAL EFFECT OF WRITERS.

GODWIN has somewhere remarked on the essential distinction between the moral object and the moral tendency of a work. A writer may present to you, at the end of his book, some unexceptionable dogma which parents would cordially admit into the copy-book ethics of their children; yet, in the process of arriving at his harmless aphorism, he may have led the mind as much astray into mischief as it is in his power to do. On the other hand, a writer may seek to work out a proposition, from the moral truth of which there would be a very general dissent, and yet be either harmless, or often instructive and elevating, from the reasonings which he employs, or even from the mere art which embellishes his composition, and supersedes, in the mind of the reader, the purpose to which the art was applied. For Art itself is essentially ethical; because every true work of Art must have a beauty or grandeur of some kind, and beauty and grandeur cannot be comprehended by the beholder except through the moral sentiment. The eye is only a witness; it is not a judge. The mind judges what the eye reports to it; therefore, whatever elevates the moral sentiment to the contemplation of beauty and grandeur is in itself ethical. Though no Christian can approve the

Digitized by Google

idolatrous worship to which the Parthenon was devoted, or which the Apollo Belvidere represented, few Christians nowadays would deny that the human intellect has been refined and exalted by the study of those masterpieces of Art. The object for which they were created by their artists is annulled, but their effect is existent and imperishable. It may indeed be said that the refinement or even the elevation of the intellect is not necessarily an improvement to the moral being; and unquestionably it must be owned that an individual, nay sometimes a generation, may combine exquisite refinement of taste with profound corruption of manners — just as it is possible that an individual or a generation may unite a sincere devotion to the mild Christian faith with the savage fanaticism of a follower of Omar; but the salutary effect of Art, as that of Christianity, must be sought not in an individual nor in a generation, but in the concrete masses of society, and in the progressive history of the human race. In Art the salutary effect may not be directly and immediately derived from the original standards, models, and types of Beauty; more often it is to be indirectly and remotely traced, in countless succession, through an intricate variety of minds, to which the originals have suggested new forms of Art, new presentations of Beauty. In the heathen temples of the East originated the outlines of the Gothic architecture now so essentially Christian.

Art, in fact, is the effort of man to express the ideas which Nature suggests to him of a power above Nature, whether that power be within the recesses of his own being, or in the Great First Cause of which Nature, like himself, is but the effect.

Digitized by Google

Art employs itself in the study of Nature, for the purpose of implying, though but by a hint or a symbol, the supernatural. By the word supernatural I mean, not that which is against Nature, but that which is above Nature. Man himself, in this sense of the word (the only sense in which Philosophy can employ it), is supernatural. And hence Jacobi, justly termed by Sir William Hamilton "the pious and profound," says with felicitous boldness, "that it is the supernatural in man with reveals to him the God whom Nature conceals." Mere Nature does not reveal a Deity to such of her children as cannot conceive the supernatural. She does not reveal Him to the cedar and the rose, to the elephant and the moth. Man alone, from his own supernatural — that is, his own spiritual — attribute, conceives at once, even in his most savage state, even in his earliest infancy, the idea of the Supernatural which Nature, without such attribute in man himself, could not reveal to him; and out of that conception is born Art, which we not only degrade, but altogether mistake and falsify, if we call it the imitation of Nature.

The acanthus leaf may suggest the form of a capital to a column; a vista through the forest stems may suggest a peristyle or an aisle. But a temple, whether in Assyria, in Greece, in China, in England, is no imitation of Nature — it is a selection from Nature of certain details arranged into a whole, to which no whole in Nature has resemblance, and intended to convey ideas of a something which man conjectures or divines to be supernatural by reason of the supernatural within himself.

It is thus with art in sculpture, in masonry, in

Digitized by Google

colour; it is so with the nobler art which finds sculpture, masonry, and colour in man's most primitive expression of thought — Language.

There is no work of true Art in language existent, nor can there ever be one, in which there is not expressed the idea of a power beyond external Nature; in which there is not some creation which external Nature never produced; in which there are not appeals to sympathies, affections, aspirations — which would be the same in the innermost shrine of man's being, if external Nature were annihilated, and man left a spirit in a world of spirit.

As, in the art of masonry, sculpture, or colour, the effect of true art is ethical, whatever the original intention or object of the artist — so it is in the art of language. All Genius comprehends Art as its necessity: where there is no art, there can be no genius in a book, any more than without art there can be genius in a picture or a statue. Every book of first rate genius is and must be a work of first-rate art; though it may be a kind of art so opposed to the fashion of the day that the common criticism of the day, nay even the finest taste of the day, may not detect and appreciate it. Neither Ben Jonson nor even Milton comprehended the sovereign Mastership of Art in Shakespeare. But Shakespeare himself could not have been conscious of his own art. And no writer, whatever his moral object, can foresee what in the course of ages may be the moral effect of his performance.

The satirical design in 'Gulliver's Trave
tainly not that which philanthropists would
to the approval of youth. It seeks to moc

Digitized by Google

by which man's original nature is refined, softened, exalted, and adorned; it directs the edge of its ridicule at the very roots of those interests and motives by which society has called cities from the quarry, and gardens from the wild; and closes all its assaults upon the framework of civilised communities with the most ruthless libel upon man himself that ever gave the venom of Hate to the stingings of wit. Yet the book itself, in spite of its design, has no immoral, no misanthropical influence: we place it without scruple in the hands of our children: the lampoon upon humanity is the favourite fairy tale of the nursery. And I doubt if any man can say that he was ever the worse for all that was meant to make him scorn and detest his species in The Voyage to Laputa or the description of the Yahoos; while the art of the book is so wonderful in rendering lifelike the creations of a fancy only second to Shakespeare's in its power of "imagining new worlds," that, age after age, it will contribute to the adornment and improvement of the human race, by perpetual suggestions to the inventive genius by which, from age to age, the human race is adorned or improved. None of us can foresee what great discoveries, even in practical science, may have their first germ in the stimulus g[illegible]o a child's imaginative ideas by the perusal o[illegible]n whic[illegible]s has made fiction truthlike, an[illegible]ellous "Wonder," says Aristotle, "[illegible]caus[illegible]ophy." This is quite as tr[illegible]ogre[illegible]ndividual as in that of the [illegible]nd[illegible]onstant aim of philosophy [illegible]its[illegible]vain. Where onder is [illegible]on[illegible]appear[illegible]an-er — tra[illegible]way[illegible]tible

Digitized by Google

But, to return to the distinction between the object and the tendency of an author's work. No one would think it necessary to vindicate the morality of Johnson's 'Rasselas,' few would extol the morality in Voltaire's 'Candide,' yet there is so much similarity in the moral object of the two stories, that Voltaire congratulated himself on having published 'Candide' before 'Rasselas' appeared. "Otherwise," he said, "I should have been accused of plagiarising the philosophical conception of the distinguished Englishman."

In fact, as two travellers may arrive at the same inn by different roads and in different company, so two writers can arrive at the same moral conclusion through very different paths; and the impression of the journey left on the mind depends on the features of the country traversed, and the companions one has had by the way. It is not rendered alike in both the travellers because they meet at last under the same sign, and conclude their adventures with a chop off the same mutton.

It is the property of true genius, in proportion as time acts upon its works, to lose its deleterious particles, and retain only those which are innocuous or salutary. The interests of mankind never concede lasting popularity to works that would seriously injure them. Some works, it is true, of an order inferior to that which is assigned to the masterpieces of genius, may be decidedly wicked in their effect if indiscriminately read; but look for them a few generations after their first appearance, and you will never find them among the current literature of a people — they will have shrunk out of sight in the obscure corners of learned libraries, referred to only by scholars or his-

Digitized by Google

torians as illustrations of manners in a bygone age, and read by them with the same cold scientific eye that a physician casts upon specimens of morbid anatomy. The works that remain incorporated in the world's literature all serve to contribute to the world's improvement. Passages, indeed, here and there, as in the classic poets, are extremely censurable; but they sink into insignificance compared with the general excellence of the pervading wholes — as, in mortal life, human imperfections and blemishes little affect the good derivable from the large example of a saint's or a hero's character. From Nature herself we may select partial evil. If we choose, out of all her products, to take the nightshade for our nutriment, though, beside the hedge in which it lurks, the prodigal corn glitters ripe in the sun, we may certainly harm ourselves, and lay the fault upon Nature; but Nature is not to blame if we devour the nightshade and eschew the corn.

The great poem of Lucretius expounds the creed of an atheist; no modern collegian was ever made an atheist by reading the poem of Lucretius. Has any modern collegian been made the better, the wiser, the nobler, by reading it? In all probability, yes! Because the poem abounds with ideas that enrich his intellect and exalt his thoughts. Its sublimity, as Dugald Stewart justly observes, "will be found to depend chiefly, even in those passages where he (Lucretius) denies the interference of the gods in the government of the world, in the lively images which he indirectly presents to his readers of the attributes against which he reasons. . . . The sublimest descriptions of Almighty Power sometimes forming a part of

Digitized by Google

his argument against the Divine Omnipotence."* In fact, the poem, to a very ordinary reason, is in itself a refutation of its philosophical purpose. It would resolve the artistic design of creation to a fortuitous concurrence of atoms. But could any one, reading the poem, conceive that those harmonious lines could be strung together by fortuitous concurrence? And follows it not, as a corollary of common sense, that, if a poem cannot be written without a poet, the universe cannot be created without a Creator?

Hence, I think, it will be found that the best and subtlest effects of writers are those of which they were themselves unconscious while writing. Critics, in later times, gain repute by discovering what the author did not mean. I have said that Shakespeare could not be conscious of his own art. How many recondite designs are imputed to him, of which he was wholly unaware? I have read an elaborate argument to prove that the character of Shylock was conceived as a plea in favour of religious toleration. But it is clearly the man to whom the idea of religious toleration is familiar, in a subsequent age, who discovers that Shylock may be applied as an illustration of an argument in favour of the emancipation of the Jews. Goethe, in examining the depths of meaning in 'Hamlet,' introduces the line, "He's fat and scant of breath," in order to give a physical clue to the intricate moral character of the Danish prince.** "The fencing tires him," says Wilhelm Meister; "and the Queen remarks, 'He's fat and scant of breath.' Can you conceive him to be other-

* Dugald Stewart 'On the Sublime,' Essay II., chap. ii.

** 'Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship.' Carlyle's Translation. Book v. c. 6.

Digitized by Google

wise than plump and fair-haired? Brown-complexioned people, in their youth, are seldom plump; and does not his wavering melancholy, his soft lamenting, his irresolute activity, accord with such a figure? From a dark-haired young man you would look for more decision and impetuosity."

The dogmas conveyed in this criticism are neither historically nor physiologically correct. If, as Wilhelm Meister had just before asserted, "Hamlet must be fair-haired and blue-eyed — as a Dane, as a Northman," — certainly, of all the populations on the earth, the Dane, the Northman, has ever been the least characterised by "wavering melancholy" or "soft lamenting." The old Scandinavian Vikings did not yield to any dark-haired warriors "in decision and impetuosity." To this day, those districts in England wherein the old Danish race left their descendants — where the blue eye and light sandy hair are most frequently seen — as in the Scottish Lowlands, the Northern Border counties, in Lincolnshire, or in Norfolk (those provinces in which Palgrave proves the wholesale settlement of the Danes), the superior activity, the practical long-headedness, the ready adaptation of shrewd wit to immediate circumstance — in short, all the attributes most opposed to the character of Hamlet, are proverbially evidenced. Nor is it true that the fair-haired children of the North are more inclined in youth to be plump than the dark-haired inhabitants of the same climate. The Yorkshireman and the Lowlander are generally high cheek-boned and lean. But is it clear that the Queen's remark is intended to signify that Hamlet is literally fat? Does the expression convey any other sense than that in

Digitized by Google

which a prize-fighter, far from corpulent, would, half-sportively, use it, in order to imply that he is out of training? If, however, the word really did convey to the audience an idea in harmony with the personal appearance of the person who uttered it, Shakespeare, as a practical stage-manager, would have meant it to apply, not to the ideal Dane, but to the flesh-and-blood actor who was performing the part; — as in 'The Midsummer Night's Dream,' the two heroines exchange satirical taunts upon their respective proportions of stature, because of the two youths who performed the parts of Hermia and Helena one was taller, the other shorter, than usual. The jest there would have been unsuccessful, indeed unsafe, if the audience were not prepared for its fitness by the contrast between the two figures bodily before their eyes. But a world of refining criticism might be written to show what subtle distinctions of character — between the tall and the short — Shakespeare designed to intimate in the verbal duel between Hermia and Helena.

Though Goethe wastes so much exquisite ingenuity on the pinguous temperament of Hamlet, no one would have acknowledged more readily than Goethe the general proposition that an author himself is unaware of the best and deepest moral deductions which a reader may draw from his works.

No poem of our age has more perplexed the critics as to its moral design than Goethe's 'Faust.' And what says the poet himself of that design? "They ask me what idea I wished to incorporate in my 'Faust.' Can I know it? Or, if I know, can I put it into words?" And indeed it is upon this fact — viz., that genius in Art cannot, like mastership in Science,

Digitized by Google

trace step by step the process which leads to its results — that Kant bases the theory by which he distinguishes art from science, and restricts to art the application of the word Genius (the innate quality of the mind — *ingenium*). "Genius," he says, "cannot of itself describe, nor scientifically demonstrate, how it accomplishes its productions, but it gives the rule by an inspiration of nature, and so the author of a production, for which he is indebted to his genius, knows not himself how the ideas form themselves in his mind. It is not in his power to form the like at his own pleasure and methodically, and to communicate to others, precepts which can enable them to accomplish the like works."

But, on the other hand, Genius has many conceptions, many subtle beauties of thought, many arcana in occult wisdom, of which it is fully cognisant, and which no critic ever detects.

Certain I am that every author who has written a book with earnest forethought and fondly-cherished designs, will bear testimony to the fact, that much which he meant to convey has never been guessed at in any review of his work; and many a delicate beauty of thought, on which he principally valued himself, remains, like the statue of Isis, an image of truth from which no hand lifts the veil.

The moral effects of writers upon the spirit of a nation must, no doubt, be considerable; yet it is difficult in this to discriminate between the effect which the writers produce on the nation, and the effect which the nation produces on the writers. A people sound at the core will not be corrupted by any meretricious or enervating literature which may be in fashion for

Digitized by Google

the time. We may certainly presume that the profligate wits, whose plays and lyrics amused Charles II. and his Court, did not form, but were formed by, the manners of a reign which did in reality substitute one revolution for another. The first reaction from revolution *is* revolution. A dominant desire to contrast the austerity of the Puritans could not result in a decorous generation. But the generation passed — with it, the fashionable literature that represented it; and England was ultimately none the worse for the ribaldry of Rochester: let us hope she is to this day the better for the sublimity of Milton.

Where a people is degenerate, it receives from its literature only excuses for its own degeneracy. The softness of Lydian manners, no doubt, served to engender the soft Lydian music. But the music, as it extended its fame among manlier communities, would have seemed to the Lydians to dignify the voluptuous effeminacy of which it was the persuasive expression.

Yet, when the Spartans, in one brief holiday of their martial existence, nationalised Alcman, the most famous of Lydian poets,* all the innovations he introduced into the Doric music — all the licence which he gave to his genius, orientally sensual — did not corrupt the Spartans. Their proudest achievements in history date long after Alcman had joined Linus and Orpheus in the Fields of Asphodel. In their private entertainments the stern lords of the Helot continued to enjoy the gay strains of the Lydian in praise of love and good cheer; but when the State was in

* See Clinton's 'Fasti Hellenici,' and Colonel Mure's 'Critical History,' for the authorities and testimonies in support of the opinion that assigns to Lydia the honour of Alcman's origin and birth-place.

Digitized by Google

danger, they gathered round the tent of their king to find fitting voice for patriotism and valour in the war-song of Tyrtæus.

The moral effect of writers is unquestionably sometimes the mere echo of the time in which they write. And such writers may, for their season, be exceedingly popular; but the probability is that their fame will not endure. Whether their effect be for good or for evil, it is on the surface of an ever-fleeting society, and not in the deeps of our ineffaceable human nature. The writers whose effect on their nation, and, beyond their nation, on the family of mankind, is permanent, are no echoes of their time, nor do they so much influence their own generation as they do the generations that succeed. Helvetius indeed has, with great force and an eloquence often noble, insisted upon the fact that the literature and the spirit of an age move in concert together. "There is an age," he observes truly, "when the word *virtus* in Italy meant both morality and valour; there has been another age when the word *virtu* meant a taste for antiquities and knick-nacks."

But Helvetius, like all enthusiasts of a system, rejects the facts which would militate against his system. He commences his 19th chapter, 'De l'Esprit,' with the dogma, that "the esteem for different kinds of genius is, in every age, proportioned to the interest the people have in esteeming them;" and proceeds thus: "To show the perfect justice of this proposition, let us first take romance for an example. From the publication of 'Amadis' to the present age, that kind of writing has successively experienced a thousand vicissitudes. Would we know the cause? . . . The

Digitized by Google

principal merit of most of these works depends on the exactness with which they paint the virtues, vices, passions, customs, follies, of a nation. But the manners of a nation change every age. This change must, then, occasion a revolution in taste, and consequently in romance. A nation is, therefore, constantly forced, by the very desire of amusement, to despise in one age what it admired in that which preceded it. What I have said of romance may be applied to almost all other works." The assertion here made is notably untrue; it applies only to indifferent and mediocre works, which perish because they are indifferent or mediocre. And a work that paints the manners of an age essentially different from our own, will be as much admired in our age as in that which gave birth to it, if it deserve such admiration from enduring qualities. The romance of Cervantes describes no manners harmonious to our own, and is more esteemed than any romance which does. Nay, the principal merit of Walter Scott consists in his portraiture of times utterly distinct from the time in which he lived.

In a very corrupt age, a vitiated moral taste may possibly accept a vicious morality as a sound one. But even in societies the most licentious, if a work by a true genius appear, presenting some innocent childlike picture of life and manners, the probability is that it will seize the public attention more firmly than it would have done in simple communities, to whose social characteristics it offered no contrast and implied no rebuke. 'Paul and Virginia' was published in a time perhaps the most cynical and profligate that France herself ever knew, yet its chaste pathetic idyll went straight and irresistibly to the public heart. I

Digitized by Google

doubt if it would have made so great a sensation in a virtuous age. But this is one instance, among many, in refutation of the axioms of Helvetius, who maintains that genius is so far dependent on manners, that it cannot win popular favour for a work to which the manners of the age are not congenial. And, indeed, in the latter part of the same chapter from which I have quoted, Helvetius, unconsciously to himself, contradicts his own doctrine, because he allows that there are works of which our esteem survives the manners they depicted, by their fidelity to human nature in general. And if this be so, such works would command the esteem of their own age, even if they represented a state of society utterly foreign to that of the age itself.

Yet there are periods when a tendency and spirit in literary compositions, which would be either inoperative or even mischievous in other periods, may become eminently effective and beneficent. For instance, suppose a time when a nation is predisposed to aggressive wars, a literature systematically stimulating the passion for military glory would either be inoperative, because not needed, or mischievous, because adding fuel to a flame already perniciously destructive. But next, suppose a time when a nation, long enervated by peace, has fallen into a drowsy neglect of self-defence — suppose that dangers are gathering round it, with which nothing can cope but the revival of a hardy martial spirit, animating the community to consent to every sacrifice for the security of their native land — then a literature, warlike and fiery, may be that which best evokes the one public virtue, without which all others would be in vain for the conservation of the

Digitized by Google

body politic, and the most martial poet would, for the moment, be the noblest moralist.

For this reason we must, if we would judge fairly of the moral *intention* of works of genius, take a comprehensive view of the times in which they were composed, and the purposes to which they served. Yet the moral *effect* of all works of a pre-eminent genius will be felt in times beyond his farthest vision, and conduce to purposes unconceived by his profoundest thought. "Mizraim cures wounds, and Pharaoh is sold for balsams."*

It may justify the indulgence which, on the whole, we are compelled, whether we will or no, to concede to all varieties of genius in their ethical objects, when we notice the fact that, where genius is pre-eminent, becomes enduring, establishes its products as a part of the 'everlasting possession' which civilisation transmits from age to age, — the good remains and the evil perishes.

Take even the author who, in the judgment of most sober Englishmen, did in his own day the most mischief, and in the most wanton spirit, by writings of which no one can dispute the genius, — I mean Voltaire. Well, not a century has passed since he closed his long career, and, strange to say, the great bulk of the works which most moved his time, is already obsolete and unread. Wit the most lavish has not preserved 'La Pucelle' from disdain; irony the keenest has not sapped one foundation in Christian faith. What of Voltaire remains popular and current? Writings either harmless or morally benignant; school

* Sir Thomas Browne, 'Hydriotaphia.'

Digitized by Google

histories, like those of Charles XII. and Peter the Great; the first suggestive sketch of social history itself in 'L'Esprit des Mœurs;' decorous tragedies constructed with an art which critics commend to the study of genius, and abounding with ethical maxims which preceptors impress on the memories of youth; and a general authority against fanaticism and persecuting bigotry, against oppression and arbitrary law.

Nay, even in his philosophy, while its siege-works against Christian Revelation have so crumbled away that they supply no corner-stone to any system which speculators have since constructed, France still owes to Voltaire's patient labour the knowledge of Newton's 'Principia,' from which she has deduced so many great discoveries of her own. Without Voltaire France might not have known La Place. And even in that special field of controversy, wherein he fought with the infidel against the Cross, while no opponent to Christianity now picks up from the dust those light shafts in which, if the feather remain, the arrow-head is broken, divines themselves yet employ the heavy mace of argument with which he demolished the atheism of Diderot, and defended those two truths which are the columns of every temple — the existence of the Deity and the immortality of the soul.

Again, it is noticeable how much even the fallacies of a great writer serve, not the less effectually, because indirectly, to the advancement of truth, by stimulating the energies of the writers who oppose the fallacies, and, in so doing, strike out new ideas and suggest fresh discoveries. How much his researches into alchemy may have warmed and emboldened the imagination of Newton, in whom imagination seems to have been only

Digitized by Google

less powerful than reason! It is said with no exaggeration, by Sir William Hamilton, "that the man who gave the whole philosophy of Europe a new impulse and direction, and to whom, mediately or immediately, must be referred every subsequent advance in philosophical speculation, was David Hume." And this less from the partisans he enlisted than from the opponents he aroused. "Accepting his principles from the dominant philosophies of Locke and Leibnitz, and deducing with irresistible evidence these principles to their legitimate result, Hume showed, by the extreme absurdity of these results themselves, either that philosophy altogether was a delusion, or that the individual systems which afforded the premises were erroneous or incomplete. He thus constrained philosophers to the alternative, either of surrendering philosophy as such, or of ascending to higher principles, in order to re-establish it against the sceptical reduction." To Hume we owe the philosophy of Kant, and therefore all that Kant himself has originated in the succeeding philosophies of Germany. To Hume again we owe the philosophy of Reid, and consequently, what is now distinctively known in Europe as the philosophy of the Scottish School, — that school which, in France, originated the intellectual movement that raised up, in Royer-Collard, Victor Cousin, and Maine de Biran, the counterpoise to the disguised materialism which had previously been accepted, with scarcely a question, in the system by which Condillac analysed every faculty into sense. These considerations tend to confirm the wisdom of complete toleration to the freedom of all opinion. Had some mistaken benevolence of intention suppressed the publication of Hume's

Digitized by Google

sceptical theories, because of the temporary harm they might effect, it would have suppressed also all those great arguments for an immaterial soul in man, which have enlarged and ennobled the whole world of thought. Kant would have continued in "his dogmatic slumber;" Reid would have remained in quiet adhesion to Locke; the materialism of Condillac would still be reigning over the schools of France.

Our obligations to genius, even where it may not mean to be our special benefactor, are so great, that our gratitude is as involuntary as the service it acknowledges. Every genius, it is true, however eminent, may find its hostile critics; but, in spite of the critics, who are frequently right in detail, we continue our homage to every eminent genius on the whole. What should we know to-day, if genius had not been free to guess, right or wrong, through the long yesterday? It was said of Plato, "If he had not erred, he would have done less." The saying does not exaggerate, it falls short of, the truth. For it may rather be said of every great man, "If he had not erred he would have done nothing." And our obligations to genius are the greater, because we are seldom able to trace them. We cannot mount up to the sources from which we derive the ideas that make us what we are. Few of my readers may have ever read Chaucer; fewer still the 'Principia' of Newton. Yet how much poorer the minds of all my readers would be if Chaucer and Newton had never written! All the genius of the past is in the atmosphere we breathe at present. But who shall resolve to each individual star the rays of the heat and the light, whose effects are felt by all, whose nature is

Digitized by Google

defined by none? This much, at least, we know; that in heat the tendency to equilibrium is constant; that in light the rays cross each other in all directions, yet never interfere the one with the other.

Digitized by Google

ESSAY XII.

ON THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN ACTIVE THOUGHT AND REVERIE.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

ON THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN ACTIVE THOUGHT AND REVERIE.

It is the peculiarity of the human mind that it cannot long, at a stretch, endure the active consciousness of its own operations. "It seems possible," says one of the most modest and cautious of physiologists, "that certain cases of madness depend on a cause which can scarcely exist, even in slight degree without producing some mental disturbance — viz., the too frequent and earnest direction of the mind inwards upon itself — the concentration of the consciousness too long continued upon its own functions." *

It is another peculiarity of the human mind that a man can as seldom say to himself, with success, "Now, I will think exclusively on this or that subject," as he can say to himself, "Now, I will dream of this or that image."

Some writer, I forget at this moment whom, declares that he did not know what it was to think till he got his pen into his hand. Pascal, on the contrary, observes that, "in the very act of writing, his thought sometimes escaped him." ** I can recall no moment of my life,

* 'Chapters on Mental Physiology.' By Sir Henry Holland, Bart., M.D. Page 77 (2d edition).

** "En écrivant ma pensée, elle m'echappe quelquefois." — 'Pensées de Pascal,' Art. IX.

Digitized by Google

out of sleep, in which ideas were not passing through my brain; nay, my own experience confirms the assertion of Kant, "that there is no sleep in which we do not dream, and that it is the rapidity with which ideas succeed each other in sleep that constitutes a principal cause why we do not always recollect what we dream." *

But it is one thing to see an undistinguishable crowd — another thing to command its numbers and marshal them into the discipline of an army; one thing to be aware of the images that rise within, and flit from us into space — another thing to form those images into ranks of thought, and direct their march towards a definite object.

Thought, as distinct from Reverie — Thought compact and practical, such as can be stamped into record or concentred into action — is generally a mechanical involuntary process, the steps of which we are unable to trace. "The understanding, like the eye, while it makes us to see and perceive all other things, takes no notice of itself."**

* "Lectures on Metaphysics," by Sir W. Hamilton, Bart., vol. I. pp. 318, 319. — "I have myself," says Sir W. Hamilton, "at different times turned my attention to the point, and, as far as my observations go, they certainly tend to prove that during sleep the mind is never inactive or wholly unconscious of its activity." Baxter has some remarks to the same effect, in a passage of his "Inquiry into the Nature of the Human Soul," which appear to have escaped the notice of more recent metaphysicians. And appended to that passage, there occurs the following note, which forestalls Kant's observation: — "A very remarkable author, writing on this subject, has these words, 'I suppose the soul is never totally inactive. I never awaked, since I had the use of my memory, but I found myself coming out of a dream; and I suppose they that think they dream not, think so because they forget their dreams.'" — M. R. Bankes's 'Defence of the Soul's Immortality.'

** Locke, Introduction to 'Essay on the Human Understanding.'

Digitized by Google

The mind, in this, greatly needs the help of some accustomed association in the physical structure. It is strange how frequently it contracts some habit of the body by which it seems to give ease to its vent, or gather vigour for its utterance. Every one accustomed to public speaking knows how much the facility with which his thoughts flow into language, and his language expands into eloquence, is increased by the freedom of gesture: it is not only that the action employed by the orator impresses the eye of the audience, but it stimulates and intensifies the thought of the orator himself, so that, if he has long accustomed himself to ungraceful and rugged gesture, though he may be fully aware of his faults — though, by the aid of an actor, he might exchange his rude spontaneous movement for an artificial elegance — he feels that, were he to do so, his oratory would lose more than it would gain. It would be long before he would cease to be embarrassed by the consciousness of his effort to suppress the defect which custom had made a part of himself; he would long want that thorough self-abandonment which gave to his rude delivery the merit of earnestness, and lent even to faults the beauty of artless passion and genuine impulse.

A counsellor, renowned for the art of his pleading, had a trick of rubbing his spectacle-case while addressing a jury. A foolish attorney who had confided a brief to him thought this action ludicrous, and likely to impair the effect of the pathetic appeals which the nature of the suit admitted. Accordingly, he watched for a sly opportunity, and stole away the spectacle-case. For the first time in his life, the counsellor's tongue faltered — his mind missed the bodily track

Digitized by Google

with which it had long associated its operations; he became confused, embarrassed — he stammered, blundered, and boggled — lost all the threads of his brief, and was about to sit down, self-defeated, when the conscience-stricken attorney restored the spectacle-case. Straightway, with the first touch of the familiar talisman, the mind recovered its self-possession, the memory its clearness, the tongue its fluency; and as, again and again, the lawyer fondly rubbed the spectacle-case, argument after argument flew forth like the birds from a conjuror's box. And the jury, to whom, a few minutes before, the case seemed hopeless, were stormed into unanimous conviction of its justice. Such is the force of habit. Such the sympathy between mental and bodily associations. Every magician needs his wand; and perhaps every man of genius has — his spectacle-case.

Some of my readers may have witnessed, and many more will have read the account of, the curious effects which Mr. Braid of Manchester produced by what is called "hypnotism," from ὕπνος (sleep). Mr. Braid rejected the theories of the mesmeriser and phrenologist, and maintained that he could produce, by action on the muscles, phenomena analogous to those with which the phrenological mesmerist startles the spectators. I saw him thus fascinate to sleep a circle of miscellaneous patients by making each patient fix successively his (or her) eyes upon a lancet-case that the operator held between finger and thumb. And when slumber had been thus induced, without aid of magnetic passes, and merely by the concentration of sight and mind on a single object, Mr. Braid said to me, "Now, observe, I will draw into play the facial

Digitized by Google

muscles which are set in movement by laughter, and ludicrous images will immediately present themselves to the sleeper." He did so gently to one of the sleepers, an old woman; pushing up the corners of her mouth. Presently the patient burst into laughter so hearty, as to be contagious amongst the audience present; and when asked the cause, told (always in slumber) a droll story of something which had happened to her a few days before, and which the muscular action, excited, had at once brought back to the memory. Next, Mr. Braid drew down the muscles on the wrinkled face of another old lady — bent her head towards the floor, and joined her hands as if in supplication — immediately the poor old creature doled forth "Lord have mercy upon us, miserable sinners," and, if left long enough to herself, would have gone through all the responses in the Litany. Another touch or two of the enchanter's wand — the head thrown upward, the forehead gently smoothed, the eyebrows lifted — and the same old woman thought she was in heaven, and began to describe the beauties of the angels. I believe that Mr. Braid has in one respect been more fortunate than his fellow Thaumaturgists, the mesmerisers. He has not been derided as a dupe, nor denounced as an impostor, by sceptical physiologists. His experiments, dating from 1842, have attracted considerable notice in England, and a still more severely critical attention abroad. In France they appear to have been confirmed and extended by the experiments of very eminent and cautious philosophers and physicians.*

* See the chapter on Hypnotism, in M. Maury's comprehensive and enlightened work, 'Le Sommeil et les Rêves,' p. 243.

Digitized by Google

Taking it then for granted that no deception was practised, either by himself or his patients, the hypnotism exhibited by Mr. Braid conveys a striking illustration of the instantaneous and involuntary sympathy between the ideas presented to our inward intelligence, and the slightest threads of that external web-work behind which sits the soul vigilant and unseen.

Certain it is that, of the most valuable of our intellectual acquisitions — viz., those which pass from hoarded savings into the grandeur and uses of reproductive capital — we can give no methodical accounts. We can number, indeed, the books we have read and the problems we have conned, but that is only to say where we have obtained the materials of fuel. When and how did the spark fall upon the fuel? When and how did the dull carbo and the dry faggot leap into warmth and blaze? The higher the genius, the less it is conscious of the degrees by which it has ascended. Yet even the most ordinary thinker amongst us would seek in vain to discover the origin and progress of his thoughts. Let him concentre his attention on that research, keep it there long and earnestly, and — Sir Henry Holland is right! — ten to one but what he will puzzle himself into Bedlam.

And here let me quote some lines by a French poet, admired in the last century and neglected in this, which have been greatly praised by Dugald Stewart for their "philosophical penetration:"

> "Enfin dans le cerveau si l'image est tracée,
> Comment peut dans un corps s'imprimer la pensée?
> Là finit ton œuvre, mortel audacieux,
> Va mesurer la terre, interroger les cieux,

Digitized by Google

De l'immense univers réglé l'ordre suprême,
Mais ne pretends jamais te connoître toi-même,
Là s'ouvre sous tes yeux un abîme sans fonds." *

But, no doubt, the cradle and nursery of definite thought is in the hazy limbo of Reverie. There, ideas float before us, rapid, magical, vague, half-formed; apparitions of the thoughts that are to be born later into the light, and run their course in the world of man.

And yet, despite their vagueness and incompleteness, how vivid, how life-like, those apparitions sometimes are! I do not give them the name of thoughts, because as yet they are not singled out of space and subjected to our command. But still they are the souls of thoughts.

That which is most marvellous to me, is the celerity with which, when musing over any truth that one desires to explore, conjecture upon conjecture, image upon image, chase each other, in ever-shifting panorama.

"If," says Marcus Antoninus,** "a man will consider what a vast number of operations the mind performs, what abundance of thoughts and sensations occur in the same moment, he will more readily comprehend how the Divine Spirit of the universe looks over, actuates, governs, the whole mass of creation!" Noble suggestion, in which lie depths of philosophy, from the impersonal pantheism systematised by Spinoza, to the divine omnipresent energy into which the pantheism is sublimely resolved by Newton.

When Kant says that "we can dream more in a

* De Lille, 'L'Imagination,' quoted by Dugald Stewart in Note P. to his Essay 'On some late Philological Speculations.'

** Lib. 6-25.

Digitized by Google

minute than we can act in a day," it seems to me that he rather understates than exaggerates; for so much is suggested in so small a point of time, that, were it in my power to transcribe all that passes through my mind in any given half hour of silent reverie, it would take me years to write it down. And this leads me to an observation, which doubtless every practised writer must often have made on himself. When, having sufficiently filled the mind with a chosen subject, and formed the clearest possible conceptions of what we intend to say on it, we sit down to the act of writing, the words are never exactly faithful to the preconceived ideas we designed them to express. We may, indeed, give the general purport of a meditated argument; the outlines of a dramatic plot, artistically planned, or of a narrative of which we have painted on the retina of the mind the elementary colours and the skeleton outlines. But where the boundless opulence of idea and fancy which had enriched the subject before we were called upon to contract its expenditure into sober bounds? How much of the fairy gold turns, as we handle it, into dry leaves! And by a tyranny that we cannot resist, while we thus leave unuttered much that we had designed to express, we are carried on mechanically to say much of which we had not even a conscious perception the moment before the hand jotted it down, as an inevitable consequence of the thought out of which another thought springs self-formed and full-grown. Even a writer so attentive to method as Cicero notices the irresistible vehemence with which the things that we think of ravish away the words — "res ipsæ verba rapiunt,"* and, in return, the words,

* Cicero, 'De Finibus,' lib. II. cap. 5.

Digitized by Google

as they rise spontaneously, seem to ravish away the thoughts.

This want of exact fidelity between thought while yet in the mind, and its form when stamped on the page, has not escaped the observation of Ancillon, a writer who ought to be better known to our countrymen; for into that wide range of knowledge through which the German scholarship is compelled to range in its tendency to generalise, he carries a sense as practical as Reid's, and an elegance of criticism as sober as Dugald Stewart's. "No language," says this charming philosopher, "is a complete and finished imprint of the human mind, were it only because all that is intellectual and invisible in our understanding, our soul, complete and entire, is not and cannot be expressed, except by metaphors borrowed from the world of the senses (*du Monde Sensible*). . . . . Where a man feels and thinks with a certain force, he cannot be content with his expressions — they say always too much or too little."*

In truth, I believe that no author, writing on a subject he has long cherished and intensely pondered over, at whatever length, or with whatever brevity, will not find that he has made but a loose paraphrase, not a close copy, of the work forewritten in the mind. All thoughts, and perhaps in proportion to their gravity and scope, lose something when transferred from contemplation into language, as all bodies, in proportion to their bulk, lose something of what they weighed in air when transferred to water.

* 'Essais de Philosophie, de Politique, et de Littérature.' Par Frederic Ancillon, de l'Academie Royale des Sciences et Belles Lettres de Prusse. 'Des Developpemens du Moi Humain.' Vol. I. pp. 77, 78.

Digitized by Google

Musing over these phenomena in my own mind, whereby I find that, in an art to which I have devoted more than thirty years' practice and study, I cannot in any way adequately accomplish my own conception; that the typical idea within me is always far, infinitely far, beyond my power to give it on the page the exact image which it wore in space; that I catch from the visible light but a miserable daguerreotype of the form of which I desire the truthful picture — a caricature that gives indeed features, and lines, and wrinkles, but not the bloom, not the expression, not the soul of the idea which the love in my own heart renders lovely to me; — musing over this wondrous copiousness of thought which escapes from me, scattering into spray as a cataract yields but drops to the hand that would seize it amidst its plashes and fall, I say to myself, "Herein I recognise that necessity for another life and other conditions of being, amid which alone thought can be freed and developed. It is in the incapacity and struggle, more than in any feat or victory, of my intellect, that I feel my thought itself is a problem only to be solved in a hereafter. At present, the more I labour to complete such powers as are vouchsafed to me, the more visible to myself is my own incompletion. And it is the sense of that incompletion which, increasing on me in proportion as I labour for completeness, assures me, in an ulterior destination, of a wider scope and less restricted powers. "Nature never disappoints — the Author of Nature never deceives us."* If the child yet unborn "were qualified to reason of his prospects in the womb of his parent, as he may afterwards do in his range on this terrestrial globe, he might

* Chalmers's 'Bridgewater Treatise,' vol. II. p. 14.

Digitized by Google

apprehend, in his separation from the womb, a total extinction of life; for how could he continue to receive it after his only supply of nourishment from the vital stock of his parent had ceased?"* Poor Unborn! — what a sceptic he might be! How notably he might argue against a future state for him! And how would that future state be best prognosticated to his apprehension? Surely it would be by referring him to those attributes of his organisation which had no necessary relation to his present state, but conveyed hints of use for a future state; in the structure of eyes meant to see a light not yet vouchsafed, of ears meant to hearken to sounds not yet heard. As the eyes and the ears to the Unborn, are those attributes of the human Mind on this earth which for this earth are not needed — on this earth have no range, no completion. And to Man we may say, as to the Unborn, "WAIT! Nothing is given to you in vain. Nature is no spendthrift; she invents nothing for which no use is designed. These superfluous accessories to your being now, are the essential provisions for your felicity and development in a state of being to come."

* Dr. Ferguson. The passage cited in the text, with additional reasonings too long to cite, is noticed with deserved compliment by Chalmers ('Bridgewater Treatise,' vol. II. p. 127). But Chalmers is evidently unaware that Ferguson's illustration is borrowed wholesale from Sir John Davies's noble poem 'On the Immortality of the Soul.'

"These children [viz. the unborn in the womb], if they had some use of sense,
And should by chance their mothers' talking hear,
That in short time they shall come forth from thence,
Would fear their birth more than our death we fear:
They would cry out, 'If we this place shall leave,
Then shall we break our tender navel-strings;
How shall we then our nourishment receive,
Since our sweet food no other conduit brings?'" &c.

Digitized by Google

For Man, every present contains a future. I say not with Descartes, "I think, therefore I am," but rather, "I am, therefore I think; I think, and therefore I shall be."

Digitized by Google

ESSAY XIII.

ON THE SPIRIT IN WHICH NEW THEORIES SHOULD BE RECEIVED.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

ON THE SPIRIT IN WHICH NEW THEORIES SHOULD BE RECEIVED.

MUCH is said by innovators in complaint of the obstinate resistance they encounter from the professors of the special branch of human knowledge which an innovation is proposed to correct or to expand. The physician in high repute is the most stubborn opponent of some new pathological theory. The lawyer who is an authority in the Courts looks with jealous apprehension on the crotchets of a jurisprudist who never held a brief. Philosophy itself, in which every system received to-day has grown out of innovations on the system in vogue yesterday, is the sturdiest opponent a speculator has to encounter, when he asks the public to accept some interpretation, or even to believe in some phenomenon of nature, which philosophers would have much to unlearn before they could admit to be philosophical. This complaint is immemorial, and was made in Athens, where the genius of innovation was tolerably audacious, not less loudly by the disciples of Anaxagoras, than it is, nowadays, by those who would ask a Brodie to acknowledge the curative effects of homœopathy, or a Faraday to convince himself that, in spite of the laws of motion, a table will jump from one end of the room to the other without being impelled by some cognate material force. And the complaint being

Digitized by Google

so ancient, and, notwithstanding our boasted exemption from the intolerance of our prejudiced forefathers, just as frequent in our age as in any age of the past, it is probable that there is something in the organisation of all societies which tends to the advancement of intellectual progress by the very caution with which the recognised leaders of the time receive suggestions to deviate into unaccustomed paths.

No river would be navigable were its velocity not checked by friction; and the friction increases as the stream proceeds, until the flow is thus made the easy thoroughfare of interchange. One man may be sure of a truth, but before all men can accept it as truth from his *ipse dixit*, many men must resist and oppose it.

In political science, the necessity of this resistance to pressure is constantly disputed, but never disputed by one politician worthy the name of statesman. All communities which advance durably and safely, contain, like Nature herself, two antagonistic powers — the one inert and resisting, the other active and encroaching. If the former be too stubborn, as it is in communities that establish hereditary castes, there can be no progress beyond the limit at which each subdivision of mental labour has been fixed in rigid monotony by a former age. Such societies may last long, but it is the longevity of a centenarian, who, whether he continue on earth five years or fifty years longer, will exhibit nothing remarkable beyond the fact that he is still alive. He holds his existence on the condition of shunning the least disturbance to the chronic mechanism of his habits.

On the other hand, where societies interpose no

Digitized by Google

hindrance to any new innovation which may, for the moment, seize on the popular humour, or be urged by a popular genius, there we may as surely predict their rapid exhaustion, as we could that of the Thames itself, if the power of friction were not opposed to the velocity of fluids. To take a familiar illustration: the first French Revolution was the headlong rush of liberty unchecked; when the Revolution stopped, liberty had run itself out. And ever since, under the bleak fissures through which it burst, and amidst the vast fragments that, whirled from its banks, became the obstructions to its course, it is only here and there that pools, deep but stagnant, reflect the ruins made by the former torrent.

As in bodies politic, so in all the departments of thought amongst which intellectual life is distributed, there must be, for safe and continuous progress, a principle that delays innovation! For by delay truth ripens — falsehoods rot. "There is," says Chalmers, finely, "a great purpose served in society by that law of nature in virtue of which it is that great bodies move slowly."* Therefore, it is not only excusable but praiseworthy, in those who are esteemed the especial guardians of knowledge, to regard with a certain jealousy all proposals to exchange the old lamps for new. But still there is no truth so venerable but what was once a novelty. And a man loves something or other better than he does truth, if he refuse to investigate any proposition professing to embody a new truth, however unfamiliar to his belief, however militant against his theories. "For my part," said one of the

* Chalmers's 'Bridgewater Treatise' — Chapter on the Connection between the Intellect and the Emotions.

Digitized by Google

most candid, and one of the most suggestive, of English philosophers — "for my part, as well persuaded as I am that two and two make four, if I were to meet with a person of credit, candour, and understanding, who should seriously call it in question, I would give him the hearing." *

Suppose that a philosopher is in doubt as to the length of a telescope in a friend's possession, and that ten persons, of whose general veracity there is no question, tell him that they have measured the telescope, and it is twenty feet long, he will accept their evidence, and cease to entertain a doubt as to the length of the telescope. But suppose this same philosopher had arrived at the conclusion that the moon is incapable of harbouring any form of organic life, and the same ten persons, whose evidence he has just accepted in a matter on which no pride of science is involved, tell him that they have been looking through a telescope at the moon, and that they all, one after the other, have seen an enormous creature endowed with organic life — they entreat the philosopher to come and see this phenomenon himself, — would the philosopher be justified in saying, "I shall not deign to take any such idle trouble. I have satisfied myself that no such creature can possibly exist in the moon. Your declaration is against the laws of Nature; excuse me if against the laws of Nature I can accept no evidence, however respectable. It is within the laws of Nature that you ten gentlemen should tell a falsehood, or be deceived by an optical illusion. I accept either of these hypotheses as possible, and I will not debase the

* Abraham Tucker's 'Light of Nature,' c. xi. sect. 34. (On Judgment).

Digitized by Google

dignity of science by examining into that which I know to be impossible:" Would the philosopher be justified in saying this?

Certainly, he would not be justified by any affection for truth. He would be a bigot from the motive most common to bigots — viz., inordinate self-esteem. But perhaps it may be said that no genuine philosopher would have so replied. Pardon me, that answer would have been a warrantable deduction from the philosophy of Hume. When Hume speaks of the wonders, or, as he calls them, "miracles," wrought at the tomb of Abbé Paris, the famous Jansenist, he says, "Where shall we find such a number of circumstances agreeing to the corroboration of one fact? And what have we to oppose to such a cloud of witnesses but the absolute impossibility or miraculous nature of the events which they relate? And this surely, in the eyes of all reasonable people, will alone be regarded as a sufficient refutation." Scarcely so; for what we call impossible in matters of fact deposed by numerous witnesses, not interested in the fabrication of a lie, is merely a something opposed to our own experience. And if a philosopher is to pronounce for himself what is impossible and what is not, there would soon be no philosophy at all. When the Indian prince asserted it to be impossible that water could become solid, it was because that assertion was opposed to his experience. But in spite of his experience, it was not only possible; it was a positive fact: and I cannot agree with Hume, that the King of Siam's incredulity was "reasonable." Modern physiology has given some solution of those "miracles" at the Jansenist's tomb, which Hume at once declared needed no other refutation than that of

Digitized by Google

their own miraculous nature. Cures that baffle science are effected by imagination. Allow for the inevitable additions which all stories receive as they pass from lip to lip, and not least the stories of unusual occurrences, and the cures wrought at the Jansenist's tomb are facts; marvels if you please, yet not miracles. Certainly Newton would not have so answered, because he never refused to examine. He "was prepared at any moment to abandon his theory." "When Bradley and others had observed a certain rotation of the earth which they could not account for, and were thinking it destroyed entirely the Newtonian system, they were under the greatest difficulty how to break it to Sir Isaac, and proceeded to do so by degrees in the softest manner." What was his only answer? "It may be so; there is no arguing against facts and experiments." He did not reply that Bradley's discovery was impossible, because it was against the laws of Nature — as those laws were interpreted by the Newtonian system. But it is more convenient to philosophers to deny the evidence of facts and experiments which oppose their system, than it is, on the strength of the evidence, to examine the facts and test the experiments; — more consonant to "the dignity of science" to say "Impossible," with Hume, than "It may be so," with Newton.

Now, had my philosopher who had decided on the laws of Nature as affecting the products of the moon, replied to the ten witnesses of the alleged creature in that orb, "It may be so; at the same time, my persuasions to the contrary are so strong that I must judge for myself," and then looked through the telescope with inquisitive, anxious eyes, perhaps he might have

Digitized by Google

found the wonder explicable, and his system unharmed. He might, indeed, have beheld the monster whose existence seemed to destroy his theory; but discovered, on careful scrutiny, that it was no inhabitant of the moon, but a blue-bottle fly that had got on the glass, and, viewed through the magnifier, seemed bigger than a dragon.

Possibly, if a philosopher who possessed in an equal degree the virtue of candour and the acuteness of science, would condescend to examine, as Bacon and Newton would unquestionably have examined, some of the modern thaumaturgia recorded by witnesses whose evidence would decide any matter of fact in any court of law, — possibly he might either make an immense progress in our knowledge of the laws of nature, or prevent incalculable mischief in the spread of a new superstition. If he say, "What you tell me is impossible — I will not stoop to examine," he abandons the field to those who examine, deprived of the guide which his science should be to them; if he come to examine with old-fashioned notions drawn from the last century's stupid materialism, which any youth of our time, fit to mature into physiologist or metaphysician, knows to be obsolete rubbish, — he may call himself a philosopher; — posterity will call him some hard name or another; certainly not philosopher. But if he say quietly, with Newton, "'It may be so — there is no arguing against facts and experiments;' I dare not say that, when you all, being respectable, intelligent men, agree that you see a monster in the moon, you are liars or idiots; but before I believe in the monster, you must permit me to examine the

Digitized by Google

telescope;" — then the philosopher is indeed a philosopher; and then he may find, and then he may prove, to the satisfaction of all whom the portent appalled, that the monster in the moon is a blue-bottle fly on the lens.

Digitized by Google

ESSAY XIV.

ON ESSAY-WRITING IN GENERAL, AND THESE ESSAYS IN PARTICULAR.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

ON ESSAY-WRITING IN GENERAL, AND THESE ESSAYS IN PARTICULAR.

"THERE is no peculiarity in Montaigne which more called forth the censure of his earlier critics than the frequent want of correspondence between the subject-matter of his discourse, and the title prefixed to it.

"Witness," says one of the friendliest of his commentators, — "Witness the Essays 'On the History of Spurina,' 'On some Verses of Virgil,' 'On Vanity,' 'On Physiognomy,' &c.; in these the author incoherently rambles from one subject to another without any order or connection."

Now, whether this peculiarity in Montaigne be really a fault or not, there is no doubt that, in him, it is not to be ascribed to the want of premeditation and care. With all his vivacity, Montaigne was essentially artistic, sparing no pains to do his best for the work to which his genius was the best adapted.

If in each succeeding edition of his Essays he did not materially correct what had been already written, it was because, as he tells us, — "Writers should well consider what they do before they give their wares to the light — they have no excuse for haste — who hastens them?" But though he so deliberately weighed the substance and so elaborately settled the form of sentences once set in type, that he found no cause to

Digitized by Google

recast them, — still, in each succeeding edition he interpolated new sentences rich with new illustrations from riper experience or extended scholarship. So that his style, as it now comes down to us, has been compared to a pearl necklace, in which all the pearls were originally of equal size, but to which, from time to time, pearls much larger have been added, increasing the value of the necklace, but impairing the symmetry of the setting.

But it is evident from his own frank avowals that Montaigne deliberately resolved, at the first, upon that freedom of movement, that licence of "leap and skip," which he continued with unabated vivacity to the last. "I go out of the way," he says, "but it is rather from a wantonness than heedlessness. I love the poetic ramble by leaps and skips — it is an art, as Plato says — light, nimble, and a little maddish." He proceeds to defend himself by the authority of his acknowledged model among the ancient writers. "There are," he observes, "pieces in Plutarch, where he forgets his theme, — where the proposition of his argument is only found by incidence, and stuffed throughout with foreign matter. Good God! how beautiful then are his variations and frolicsome sallies, and then most beautiful when they seem to be fortuitous and introduced for want of heed. It is the inattentive reader that loses my subject, and not I: there will always be found some phrase or other in a corner, that is to the purpose, though it lie very close." *

It is clear from all this that Montaigne wrote as great artists do write — viz., from an unerring percep-

* Montaigne, 'Of Vanity,' Cotton's Translation, Revised Edition, 1776.

Digitized by Google

tion of that which was most suitable to his own genius, and let me add, of that which may be less evident to the commonplace order of critics — viz., the true theory and spirit of the kind of work which had engaged his forethought and concentrated his study.

For in the art of essay-writing there appear to be two extremes necessarily opposed to each other — towards one or the other of which the intermediate varieties of that class of composition tend to gravitate — firstly, the essay which is in spirit and form didactic, and sets forth a definite proposition, to be established by logical reasoning and connected argument. In such essays, addressed rigidly to the understanding, the personality of the writer disappears. In a treatise on the Circulating Medium, on the Comparative Populousness of the Ancient States, on some vexed point in political economy, statistics, moral science, &c., the author, even where his name gives to his opinions a recognised authority, must not distract your attention from his argument by attempts to engage your interest in himself. Directly opposed to this species of essay is that in which the writer does not profess to enforce any abstract proposition by sustained ratiocination, but rather pours forth to the reader, as he would to an intimate friend, his individual impressions and convictions, his sentiments, his fancies; not imposing on you a schoolman's doctrine, but imparting to you a companion's mind. He does not sternly say to you, "You should think this or that;" but rather, "This or that is what I think, fancy, or feel." As the first-mentioned kind of essay, addressed solely to the understanding, is inherently didactic in the substance, so it is essentially prosaic in the style. Whatever the elegance of its

Digitized by Google

periods, whatever the felicity of its ornaments, still the elegance is that of appropriate lucidity in statement and polished vigour in reasoning; and the ornament is only felicitous, where, like the golden enrichment of the Milanese coats of steel, it renders more conspicuous the sterner metal on which it bestows an additional value. But the second kind of essay has in it much of the generical spirit of poetry. And so Montaigne himself very justly conceived, implying the excuse for his own playful licences, where alone it ought to be sought, and where his critics had neglected to look for it — viz., in the truth that poetical genius of high order will have its way, and though its mode of expression may dispense with verse, it can never be justly understood if it be only looked on as prose. "A thousand poets," says Montaigne, in treating of his own compositions, "creep in the prosaic style; but the best old prose (and I strew it here, up and down, indifferently for verse) shines throughout, and has the lusty vigour and boldness of poetry, not without some air of its frenzy. . . . . I mean that the matter should distinguish itself; it sufficiently shows where it changes, where it concludes, where it begins, and where it rejoins, without interweaving it with words of connection, introduced for the service of dull and inattentive ears."* And the kind of poetry to which such form of essay belongs, is that which is most opposed to the didactic, and may be described in the words by which Hegel has defined the character of lyrical poetry in its difference from the epic.

"That," says this exquisite critic, "which the lyrical

* Montaigne, 'Of Vanity,' Cotton's Translation, Revised Edition, 1776.

Digitized by Google

poetry expresses in the subjective, — the interior world, the sentiments, the contemplations, and the emotions of the soul; instead of retracing the development of an action, its essence and its final goal are the expression of the interior movements of the mind of the individual. . . . . It is the personal thought, the internal sentiment and contemplation, in whatsoever they have truthful and substantial. And the poet expresses them as his own thought, his passion peculiar to himself, his personal disposition, or the result of his reflections."

Apply this definition to the Essays of Montaigne, and it fits as exactly as it does to the Odes of Horace. Elsewhere I have called Montaigne the Horace of Essayists — an appellation which appears to me appropriate, not only from the subjective and personal expression of his genius, but from his genial amenity; from his harmonious combination of sportiveness and earnestness; and, above all, from the full attainment of that highest rank in the subjective order of intellect, when the author, in the mirror of his individual interior life, glasses the world around and without him, and, not losing his own identity, yet identifies himself with infinite varieties of mankind.

Just as Shakespeare has precedence over all poets who deal with the objective, inasmuch as his own personality is so abnegated or concealed that it needs much patient study in the observer who endeavours to ascertain Shakespeare's individual opinions and beliefs apart from those which he puts into the lips of his characters, so Montaigne's precedence over all essayists who have regarded nature and life from the subjective point of view is maintained by the hardy frankness with which he carries out to the extreme the lyrical

Digitized by Google

characteristic of individualised personality. That which is called his egotism forms the charm and the strength of his genius. And here it is that he stands alone, because no other essayist has united the same courage in self-exposition with the same close family resemblance to the generality of mankind. Rousseau or Cardan may be as confidingly egotistical as Montaigne, but they present to us in their personalities creatures so exceptional, so unlike the general character of mankind, that they appear almost abnormal, and we are not even sure that they are thoroughly sane.

Between these two opposed schools in essay — viz., that which argues, like Hume, for a specific proposition, and that which, like Montaigne, rather places before the reader the thoughts and sentiments of an individual mind — there are many gradations, in which both schools are more or less mingled, and to which, therefore, I give the name of the Mixed Essay. In Bacon's Miscellaneous Essays there is little logical argument; but there is a laconic adherence to the thesis set out, maintained by sententious assertion on the authority and *ispe dixit* of the writer, who thereby rather insinuates than proclaims his personality: with Johnson the personality is somewhat more obtruded, and the assertion more supported by argument: with Addison the distinctions between the two classes of composition are more obviously preserved. In the Essay on the 'Pleasures of Imagination,' for instance, Addison is almost wholly scholastic and objective, arguing his question as a truth deduced from principles exterior to his own personal impressions; but in the Essay on 'Superstition' ('Spectator,' 12), or on 'Professions' ('Spec-

Digitized by Google

tator,' 21), there is little more than what we may assume to be the lyrical effusion of his own contemplations and reflections. The charming Essays of Elia are almost wholly of the latter description. Their egotism is chastened and subdued, but their personality is never relinquished: it is not philosophy that selects its problem, and proceeds to solve it — it is Charles Lamb who, philosophising through whim and fancy, allures you to listen to Charles Lamb.

These humble lucubrations are necessarily of the mixed or eclectic school of Essay. I am too English — that is, too shy to become the candid reporter of myself, and emulate the courageous confidence in the sympathy of his reader with which Montaigne dilates on his personal habits and his constitutional ailments. Neither do I desire so to contract my experience, and so to reject the free play of speculation and fancy, as to move undeviatingly along the straight line of logic towards some abstract proposition. It is not every bird that flies as the crow flies towards its food or its nest. Unquestionably, herein I retain my personality, because without it all other kind of essay than the argumentative and scholastic would be characterless and lifeless. In fiction the writer rarely speaks for himself; when he does so, it is but episodically — covertly — without giving us any tangible guarantee of his individual sincerity. In politics, and indeed in all polemics, the disputant argues for a cause, and in so doing it is better to cite any other authority than his own. But in monologues of this kind it is a mind, and a heart, and a soul that are honestly giving out to the world what they have imbibed from experience, through the varied process of observation, reflection,

Digitized by Google

outward survey, and interior contemplation. Certainly many may say, "What care we what this man thinks, fancies, feels, believes, or questions? His opinions or sentiments are in no account with us. If he affirms, 'I will prove a truth,' we will listen to him, not for his sake, but for the sake of the truth. But when he merely says, 'I think, I feel,' a fico for his thoughts and his feelings!"

Certainly many may so say, and I have no right to blame them. I can only reply, with all possible meekness, that I entertain no such contempt for the mind of any fellow-man; that to me no class of reading is more pleasant, and not many classes of literature more instructive, than that in which a man, who has lived long enough in the world of men and of books to have acquired a wide experience of the one, and gathered some varied stores for reflection from the other, imparts to me the results to which one mind arrives from lengthened and diversified interchange with many minds. I need not necessarily take him as a judge upon matters of controversy; but at least I may form my own judgment the better by admitting him as a witness. I do not ask him to be always saying something new. If, having wit or courage enough to say something new (than which nothing is more easy), he yet, after the siftings and weighings of his own unbiassed judgment, arrives at a conclusion as old as a proverb, I am pleased to find a fresh corroboration of some belief which I have been accustomed to cherish as a truth.

Charmed with observing in Degerando's 'Comparative History of the Systems of Philosophy,' the reflected image of his own life and thought from youth, Goethe

Digitized by Google

exclaims, in that careless strength with which he flings abroad solid masses of truth, — "The great thing, after all, is to know on which side we stand, and where."

Thus it never occurs to me, in the composition of these Essays, to aim at that praise for originality which is readily obtained by any writer who embodies paradoxes hostile to common sense in language perversive of common English. I know that I cannot fail to say much that is original, whether I will or not, because I am here simply expressing my own mind, as formed by life and by reading. No other human being in the world can have gone through the same combinations of experience in life, or the same range of choice in reading. Therefore, whatever its general resemblance to others, still in many respects my mind must be peculiar to myself, and the expression of it must in many respects be original. It is so with every man, whatever the degree of his talents, who has lived variously and read largely. He may not be original when he deals with fiction; for invention there is intuitive, is genius, the gift of the gods. But when he is not inventing a fable, nor imagining beings who never existed, and going utterly out of himself to assign to them motives he never experienced, and actions he never committed; — when, in short, he is merely taking off the stamp of his own mind, there can be no other impression wholly like it, and he is original without genius and without labour.

In fiction, I am nothing if I do not invent; that cannot critically be called a novel which does not artistically convey a novelty; but in this confessional of thought I say what I think, indifferent whether it be new or old. Though I may come to conclusions to

Digitized by Google

which millions have arrived before, and in passing onward to those conclusions may utter much which thousands have already uttered, yet I am not the less sure that, here and there, I shall chance upon combinations of ideas which have never hitherto been so combined, and that there is not a single one of these Essays in which some remarks wholly original will not be found by a reader to whom a fair degree of knowledge has taught the required justice of observation. He who accuses me, herein, of the want of originality, accuses himself of that want of discrimination which comes from carelessness or ignorance. "There are things," says Goethe, "which you do not notice, only because you do not look at them." All the leaves in an oak tree, all the faces in a flock, are the same to the ordinary eye; but the naturalist can find no two leaves exactly alike, and the shepherd can distinguish every face in his flock by some original peculiarity.

I leave it to professed philosophers to group certain facts together, and then form them into a definitive system. Schelling, while showing how unstable, shifting, evanescent all systems are, still thinks it essential to pure reasoning that a sage must make choice of a system which, as it were, holds together the threads of his argument, and converges the rays of his thought.

"System," says Sir William Hamilton, "is only valuable when it is not arbitrarily devised, but arises naturally out of the facts, and the whole facts, themselves. On the other hand, to despise system is to despise philosophy; for the end of philosophy is the detection of unity."

Certainly I do not despise philosophy; but I cannot

Digitized by Google

help remarking how much Time despises system. To the system of Locke, more rigidly narrowed by Condillac, and culminating in Hume, succeeds the system of Reid. From the system of Reid grows the system of Kant; from the system of Kant emanates the system of Schelling, the system of Hegel — whatever other new system may now be rising into vogue. Systems spring up every day, wither down, and again effloresce. Scarcely does Lamarck seem defunct and forgotten, ere, out-Lamarcking Lamarck, appears Darwin! Sir William Hamilton, exulting in this perpetual transmutation of systems in the crucible of Time, exclaims, with grave enthusiasm, "As experiment results from the experiment it supersedes, so system is destined to generate system in a progress never attaining, but ever approximating to, perfection." But this progress consists in periodical retrogressions; — if it approximate to perfection, it is always harking back to some system dismissed long ago as wholly imperfect. Perplexed by the phenomena of hypnotism, mesmerism, and the like thaumaturgia, physiology (at least in the more progressive schools of the Continent) has recurred for its most valuable hints to the mysticism of Alexandrian Platonists, who are again taken down from their shelves to corroborate "a system." Within the last twenty years, Van Helmont has become once more an authority; and there is scarcely a new work treating of psychology which the inquirers of France and Germany have lately put forth, wherein the great discoverer of gas is not quoted with respect. M. Maury, accounting rationally for the phenomena ascribed to magic, vulgarly confounded with conjuring or imposture, says, with simple truth, "The secret of magic is to be sought

Digitized by Google

in physiology" — viz., it is centred in rare effects, producible on certain constitutions. But that is no discovery; it had been said before by the sages of antiquity, and the illuminati of the middle ages.

The whole tendency of philosophy at this moment on the Continent is towards a return to philosophies long neglected. What a reaction is silently going on towards Aristotle! I see amongst the most "progressive" schoolmen of Europe the rise of scaffoldings for the restoration of antique thrones.

Where innovation is boldest, it is often in reducing a number of complex ideas, which have been, as it were, the crystallisations of Time round an original monad, back to the monad itself, and so leaving it to Time to crystallise the monad again.

Bichat materialised the old triple divisions of life — the animal, the rational, the spiritual — into the two forms, "life organic and life vegetable." Tissot, nowadays, rejects all divisions whatsoever, and in that search for unity which our great Scotch metaphysical critic calls "the end of philosophy," consolidates and cramps all that we think, feel, and imagine, into one absolute unity — LIFE. Notable discovery! which, in plain words, simply means this, Life is life! Probably that much was known before the Egyptians had founded a college, or the Chaldees consulted a star.

The systems of Newton and Bacon still keep their ground, but not unassailed. Time already, though as yet with no noisy strides, is on his march against them. Whoever is somewhat familiar with the speculative reasonings of Continental Europe in these later days, will find audacious questionings even of the doctrine of gravitation, and still more daring assertions that the

Digitized by Google

Baconian system of induction is not only inapplicable to those problems which man most desires to solve, but, if adhered to inflexibly, would leave our own nature the most hopeless of riddles. Certainly I say not that these temerarious besiegers of the only two systems of modern thought which are still standing, seemingly strong and secure, on the last boundaries of human reason, have embraced a cause which established philosophy should even deign to examine; or that, by marching with them, we shall "approximate towards perfection." I dare not presume to conjecture a flaw in the codes of a Newton or Bacon; but this I do venture to predicate, that sooner or later the ranks of the besiegers will swell, and carry the day. New systems will replace for a time even those of the 'Novum Organum' and 'Principia.' But two thousand years after that victory, the 'Novum Organum' and 'Principia' will again be re-aired and well dusted, and set up in the schools as the only sound systems; they will then be called novelties, "approximating towards perfection." Time sees the systems pass and re-pass, emerge and evanish, re-arise and re-wane, with a calm and contemptuous indulgence. But that which Time does retain everlastingly in honour, is the philosopher's thought, apart from his system.

The thought of Copernicus, Kepler, Descartes, stands aloft and imperishable, though we scarce see even the wrecks of their systems, the sites which they occupied have been so built upon. It is with them as with cities, in which the unity of a thought goes with the unity of a name. London conjures up the one idea of a London, though three Londons at least be buried under our streets. When lately I read through the

Digitized by Google

completed edition of Descartes — which for the first time gives to convenient and familiar survey the whole structure of that mind which the bold thinker tells us he built up for himself — comparing the grandeur and soundness of his detached ideas with the puerilities and crotchets of his system, I could not help exclaiming, "How could this absolute king ever pass from his throne to a school!" Let those reasoners who cannot think except upon system, fasten thought to a system, as men who plant trees tie their stems to a stake. The cord will rot away; the stake will perish. Even if cord and stake answered their purpose for the time, still the tree, needing them no more, lifts itself into air, freed from the prop it has outgrown. For myself, I do not pretend to be a philosopher; and if I did, I know of no sect of philosophy to which I could unreservedly give a disciple's adhesion. I do not presume to call myself even a scholar — illustrious and venerable name; but I am, and have been for years — which should have given some compensations in experience for all that they have borne away from me in hope — a student of life and of books; and that which in such study has become part and parcel of my mind, be it old, be it new, be it a truth or a fallacy, I gossip forth in these Essays. I have known the public so long that I cannot but regard it as a friend. Alas! how few friendships are left to me half as long, half as intimate, as that which I claim with thyself, O my Reader! As I talk to those I know best, so I write here. I affect not to dictate; my desire is to suggest.

If I may judge by the letters I have received on the different subjects broached in these miscellanies —

Digitized by Google

many of such letters being from men whom it most flatters a writer to class amongst his readers — I venture to hope that I have not wholly failed in my aim. For I observe, that whether my correspondent express concurrence in or dissent from some idea that he herein met with — that idea, whatever its worth or want of worth, has suggested independent tracks of idea to himself. Who, on retracing the history of his own mind, does not feel how much he owes to some writer, perhaps comparatively obscure, or some guess, little heeded by others, which chanced to suggest a something that it made him restless to prove or disprove to himself? "*Non fingor hypotheses*," said Newton, with a scorn we revere in a Newton, to whom scorn was so rare. Still, if Newton disdained an hypothesis, he rejoiced in a guess. What are his queries but guesses? And let strict mathematicians forgive me, but he who rests contented with Newton's solutions can advance no farther. A realm of thought wide enough for a hundred centuries may be found in his queries. His solutions prove, and there end. His queries suggest: where finds suggestion a limit?

If, then, some tyrannical Afrite, wroth with my modest disavowal of system, or my arrogant pretensions to suffer my thoughts to grow without cord and stake, should say to me, "System of some kind thou shalt choose," my system should be the suggestive, because it is given to few men to prove, and to all men to suggest.

Let me explain the word suggestive. Thought is valuable in proportion as it is generative. If vital itself, though it be but a germ, it vitalises thoughts in others which may bloom into petals, or mature into

Digitized by Google

fruits not vouchsafed to the thinker in whom it originates. I cast my thoughts freely abroad; let the winds waft them loose. It is according to the soil on which they fall that they will be sterile or fertile. The best education is that which wakes up the mind to educate itself. He who adopts a system imposes on his ideas a limit. "This is my system," cries Square or Thwackum. "Take all or take nought; it is one welded whole, indivisible." There is no welded whole possible to man's mind, if the mind means to grow. The whole of to-day is a part, and a vanishing part, in every intellect that has before it a morrow. Better some stray playful thought that comes in unawares, through the open doors of our own unsuspicious thinking, and calls up our own reason to examine the face of the stranger, and judge for itself whether to banish or welcome him, than a regiment of thoughts billeted upon us, expelling our own ideas out of their accustomed rooms, foreigners with whom we have no familiar language, and who, in leaving us, will be succeeded by some other detachment as foreign and as oppressive.

All schools of thought with the *verba magistri*, by which their disciples must swear, are finite and therefore mutable. To embrace as infallible any one system concocted by fallible men, is to exchange our own bold and teeming inventions for formulæ that say, "Think for yourselves no more! These are the rules, from which deviations are errors. These fix the last boundaries of invention, for these are the consummation of truth."

I come then to your hearth, O my Reader, an unpretending visitor — privileged to say frankly what

Digitized by Google

I doubt, believe, or deny, yet imposing no dogmas of doubt, belief, or denial on yourself; but if, while I converse, I stir up your own mind to examine what *you* believe, doubt, or deny, my task is accomplished. I ask no simple man to get up from his easy-chair, and say, "Here comes a philosopher;" but if, after hearing me, as he sits undisturbed, he feels inclined to philosophise, I steal away and leave him to muse. Man, after all, must think for himself, or he does not complete his own intellectual existence — he does but reflect another man's.

To learn how to form letters in a copy-book is one thing, to learn how to express your own ideas is another thing. Education commences with a system — that is, with the writing-master. A teacher comes to you with ruler and copy-book, jots down a neat moral saw, or an arithmetical proposition, "Honesty is the best policy," or "Three times three make nine." Copy these dogmas in round hand, without a blot, and the writing-master pats you on the head — says, "Good boy," and departs. And if you have no other teacher, a boy, good or bad, you will remain till you die. But after him of the ruler and copy-book there comes the suggester. By that time you write running-hand, and have got beyond copying another man's dogma, though it may be as useful and as true as the propositions that "Honesty is the best policy," and "Three times three make nine," and the suggester says, "Write a theme!" "What the subject?" "Any you please, no matter how trite — 'The beauties of spring,' 'The shortness of life.'"

"And how shall I write it?" asks the diffident pupil. Is the suggester a wise one? Then he answers,

Digitized by Google

"I start but the subject. Think for yourself and write."

As the theme-suggester, compared to the writing-master, is the man who says, "Think for yourself — I start but the subject," — to the man who says, "Copy without a blot what I dictate to you."

Think for thyself, O my Reader. Even if thou acceptest a school, in which to walk in the beaten track made by thinkers before thee is called "safe thinking," unroll any chart of a kingdom or province, and note how narrow and thin are the lines of the highways compared to the country around them — how little thou canst see of the country, if thou never turn aside from the road. When thou gazest on the track of light which the moon makes on the ocean, that track to thy vision seems the one luminous path through the measureless waste of the darkness around it; but alter the course of thy bark, and the track shifts with the course — those waves illumined which before were rayless, and those in darkness which before were bright. For the dark and the light vary still with thine own point of vision; and, in truth, the moon favours not one wave more than another. Truth makes on the ocean of nature no one track of light — every eye looking on finds its own.

Digitized by Google

ESSAY XV.

THE SANGUINE TEMPERAMENT.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

THE SANGUINE TEMPERAMENT.

We are always disposed to envy the man of a hopeful temper; but a hopeful temper, where it so predominates as to be the conspicuous attribute, is seldom accompanied with prudence, and therefore seldom attended with worldly success. It is the hopeful temper that predominates in gamblers, in speculators, in political dreamers, in enthusiasts of all kind. Endeavouring many years ago to dissuade a friend of mine from the roulette table, I stated all the chances which calculators sum up in favour of the table against the gamester. He answered gaily, "Why look to the dark side of the question? I never do!" And so, of course, he was ruined. I observe, in reading history and biography, that the men who have been singularly unfortunate have for the most part been singularly hopeful. This was remarkably the case with Charles I. It startles one to see in Clarendon how often he is led into his most fatal actions by a sanguine belief that fate will humour the die for him. Every day a projector lays before you some ingenious device for extracting sunbeams from cucumbers, with the most sanguine expectation that the age has just arrived at the certainty that his cucumber alone can enlighten it. The late Mr. Robert Owen remained to the last as sure of converting the world to his schemes for upsetting it, as if

Digitized by Google

he had never known a disappointment. When, a short time before his death, that amiable logician, after rejecting all the evidences of nature and all the arguments of sages in support of the soul's immortality, accepted that creed on the authority of a mahogany table, the spirit of one of George IV.'s portly brothers, evidently wishing to secure so illustrious a convert, took care to rap out "Yes" when Mr. Owen asked if he should bring his plans before Parliament; and to sustain his new faith in a heaven, by promising him that within a year his old hope of reforming the earth should be realised. Had his Royal Highness told him that he could never square the circle of life by a social parallelogram, I greatly fear that Mr. Owen would have remained materialist, and declared table-rapping to be a glaring imposture.

In my recollections of school and college, I remember that, as between two youths of equal ability and ambition, the odds of success in rivalry were always in favour of the one least sanguinely confident of succeeding. And obviously, for this reason: He who distrusts the security of chance, takes more pains to effect the safety which results from labour. To find what you seek in the road of life, the best proverb of all is that which says, "Leave no stone unturned."

As all men, however, have in their natures a certain degree of hope, so he is the wisest who husbands it with the most care. When you are engaged in any undertaking in which success depends partly on skill, partly on luck, always presuppose that the luck may go against you, for that presupposition redoubles all your efforts to obtain the advantages that belong to skill. Hope nothing from luck, and the probability is

Digitized by Google

that you will be so prepared, forewarned, and forearmed, that all shallow observers will call you lucky.

At whist, a game into which, of all games needing great skill, perhaps luck enters most, indifferent players, or even good players who have drunk too much wine, will back some run of luck upon system, and are sure to lose at the year's end. The most winning player I ever knew was a good but not a first-rate player, and, playing small stakes, though always the same stakes, he made a very handsome yearly income. He took up whist as a profession instead of the bar, saying ingenuously: "At the bar, if I devoted myself to it, I think I could make the same yearly sum with pains, which at whist I make with pleasure. I prefer pleasure to pain when the reward is equal, and I choose whist." Well, this gentleman made it a rule never to bet, even though his partner were a B. or a C. (the two finest players in England now living since the empire of India has lost us General A.), and his adversaries any Y. Z. at the foot of the alphabet. "For," said he, "in betting on games and rubbers, chance gets an advantage over the odds in favour of skill. My object is to win at the year's end, and the player who wins at the year's end is not the man who has won the most games and rubbers, but the man who in winning has made the greatest number of points, and who in losing has lost the fewest. Now if I, playing for, say, 10s. a point, with B. or C. for my partner, take a £5 bet on the rubber, X. and Y. may have four by honours twice running; and grant that I save two points in the rubber by skill, losing six points instead of eight points, still I have the bet of £5 to pay all the same: the points are saved by the skill of the

Digitized by Google

playing, but the rubbers are lost by the chance of the cards."

Adhering to this rule, abridging the chances of the cards, concentrating his thoughts on the chances in favour of skill, this whist-player, steady and safe, but without any of those inspirations which distinguish the first-rate from the second-rate player, made, I say, regularly a handsome income out of whist; and I do not believe that any first-rate whist-player who takes bets can say the same, no matter what stakes he plays.

In life as in whist: Hope nothing from the way cards may be dealt to you. Play the cards, whatever they be, to the best of your skill.

But unhappily, life is not like the whist-table; you have it not at your option whether to cut in or not; cut in and play your hand you must. Now, talking of proverbs, "What must be must." It is one thing to be the braggadocio of hope, and it is another thing to be the craven of fear. A good general, before fighting a battle in which he cannot choose his ground — to which he is compelled, will he, nill he — makes all the provisions left in his power, and then, since "what must be must," never reveals to his soldiers any fear of the issue. Before it comes to the fight, it is mapping and planning. When the fight begins, it is "Forwards, and St. George!"

An old poet, Lord Brook, has two striking lines, which I will quote, and then qualify —

> "For power is proud till it look down on fear,
> *Though only safe by ever looking there.*"

No! not safe by *ever* looking there, but by looking there — at the right moment.

Digitized by Google

Before you commence anything, provide as if all hope were against you. When you must set about it, act as if there were not such a thing as fear. When you have taken all precautions as to skill in the circumstances against which you can provide, dismiss from consideration all circumstances dependent on luck which you cannot control. When you can't choose your ground, it is "Forwards, and St. George!" But look for no help from St. George unless you have taken the same pains he did in training his horse and his dogs before he fought with the dragon. In short, hope warps judgment in council, but quickens energy in action.

There is a quality in man often mistaken for a hopeful temperament, though in fact it is the normal acquisition of that experience which is hope's sternest corrective — the quality of self-confidence.

As we advance in years, hope diminishes and self-confidence increases. Trials have taught us what we can do, and trained us to calculate with serene accuracy on the probable results. Hope, which has so much to do with gaming, has nothing to do with arithmetic. And as we live on, we find that for all which really belongs to the insurance against loss, we had better consult the actuary than stake against the croupier.

"Fortune," saith a fine Latin proverb, "lends much at interest, but gives a fee-simple to none." According to the security you offer to her, Fortune makes her loans easy or ruinous.

Self-confidence is not hope; it is the self-judgment of your own internal forces, in their relation to the world without, which results from the failure of many

Digitized by Google

hopes, and the non-realisation of many fears. For the two classes of things that most rarely happen to us, are the things we hoped for and the things we dreaded. But there is one form of hope which is never unwise, and which certainly does not diminish with the increase of knowledge. In that form it changes its name, and we call it patience. "Patience," says Vauvenargues, "is only hope prolonged." It is that kind of hope which belongs to the highest order of mind, and is so essential to the enterprises of genius, that Buffon calls genius itself "a long patience" — as Helvetius calls it "a sustained attention." Patience, indeed, is the soul of speculation, "and the scope of all speculation is the performance of some action or thing to be done."* This is the true form of Hope that remained at the bottom of Pandora's Box; the more restless images or simulacra of the consolatory sustainer must have flown away among the earliest pinions that dispersed into air at the opening of the lid.

* Hobbes.

Digitized by Google

ESSAY XVI.

THE ORGAN OF WEIGHT.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

THE ORGAN OF WEIGHT.

I BELIEVE that phrenologists are generally agreed in allotting to the frontal sinus an organ which they call the organ of weight, asserting that where this organ is largely developed, the individual has a special faculty in estimating not only the ponderabilities of sacks of grain and bars of iron, but the probable results of any course of action on which the pressure of circumstance rivets his more immediate attention.

Now, upon the truth of Phrenology I hazard no opinion; it is one of those vexed questions in which, not being convinced by the arguments of either party, I am contented to observe, with the Silent Gentleman in the 'Spectator,' "that there is a great deal to be said upon both sides."

But putting wholly out of consideration all reference to craniological development, and leaving anatomists to dispute whether or not there be any such organ of weight in the frontal sinus, I venture to borrow from the phrenologists their technical term, and designate as the "organ of weight" that peculiar mental faculty of weighing the relative consequences of things *immediately* placed before them, which in some men is so saliently developed, in other men so notably deficient.

In fact, I know of no other form of words in which I can so accurately define the quality of mind of which

Digitized by Google

I am about to treat. This organ of weight is distinct from what can properly be called prudence; for prudence necessitates a degree of foresight extending far beyond the immediate consequences of things immediately present. The prudent man declines to pursue such and such courses because he foresees that they will lead him astray, or that he shall have to retrace his steps. But this organ of weight is often found most conspicuous in those who have no pretensions of foresight; they weigh only what is close before them. Hence I have noticed that such men are liable to abrupt changes of conduct, and in public life are more exposed than many politicians less conscientious to the charge of deceiving their followers and betraying their cause. They advance, as it were, mechanically along the track of ideas to which they have been accustomed, regarding as impracticable theorists those who extend their survey of the road; and when at last they come to a place where the consequences foretold by others, and disregarded by themselves as too remote to be brought into their scales, become tangibly present, and the question is not, "What shall we do by-and-by?" but, "What is to be done now?" — then they cry, "*This* is serious! *this* has become a practical substance! — we must weigh it well!" And weighing it well, they often decide, with an abruptness which takes the world by surprise, that what before they had declared was too light to consider, is now too heavy to bear. In short, and without metaphor, they do exactly that, as the only prudent thing to do, which they had assured their confiding friends was the last thing that prudent men should contemplate doing.

If, then, this organ of weight cannot be correctly

Digitized by Google

described by the word Prudence, neither is it to be expressed by the name more commonly assigned to it — viz., Judgment. It is indeed a part of judgment, but only a part of it: for judgment, in the full sense of that rare and admirable quality, consists in a justness of vision which comprehends a wide survey of many things near and distant, in order to ascertain the proportionate size of each thing within its scope, be it near, be it distant. Judgment comprehends measurement as well as weight; and though it does not indeed absolutely need the prevision essential to that prudence which the ancients esteemed the associate and counsellor of the diviner orders of wisdom, according to their famous proverb, that "No deity is present where Prudence is absent," still judgment has a logic which links circumstance to circumstance, cause to effect — examines fully the grounds on which it forms its opinions, and observes each new fact which varies the value of evidence it had hitherto received. Hence, the man of judgment *par excellence*, when he modifies or changes any opinion that he had deliberately formed and openly professed, does so not with startling suddenness, but, gradually connecting link by link the reasons which induce him to reverse his former conclusions, prepares the minds of others for the final announcement of the change which has been at work within his own; so that he does not appear the advocate who betrays the cause of the client whose suit he had undertaken, but the judge impartially summing up, according to the facts which he does not warp, and the laws which he cannot depart from. I think, for instance, this may be said of Mr. Pitt, who, whether he relinquished as impracticable what he had previously

Digitized by Google

insisted on as judicious, or whether he denounced what he had before recommended, still so prepared the public mind for such changes in himself, that no man could accuse him of treachery, and only very inaccurate observers of fickleness. In this respect he was more happily constituted than Sir Robert Peel, who resembled him in many illustrious attributes, whether of dignified personal character, or devotion to what conscientiously appeared to his mind the interests of the State. In Sir Robert Peel the organ of causality was not proportioned to the organ of weight. Foresight no candid admirer could assign to the man, in whom candour nevertheless finds so much to admire; nor can he be said to have possessed that order of reason which so adjusts and accommodates its whole tenor of action, that what its possessor does to-day grows like a logical sequence out of what he did yesterday. Hence those startling changes of political conduct, in which, having unhesitatingly led his followers up to a certain point, he seemed, in deserting them, to abandon his former self. For remote contingencies he had no astronomer's telescope; for consequences immediately before him he had the mechanician's eye — he weighed them at a glance.

In men of this character there is generally a very strong sense of responsibility; and perhaps no public man ever possessed that ennobling sense in a finer degree than Sir Robert Peel. And the consciousness of his own responsibility became necessarily strong in proportion as it was suddenly revealed to him. In opposition, a man is not considered by the public responsible for the results that may follow the adoption of his advice. But both by the spirit of the con-

Digitized by Google

stitution and the opinion of the public, the moment the same man is transferred from opposition to office, responsibility begins. And in proportion as his influence and position in office are eminent and commanding, the responsibility increases in multifold ratio. A man who had grown into so great an authority with the nation as Sir Robert Peel, was responsible to other trustees than those of party: he was responsible to the people, who confided in him even more than party did; and the posterity to which his renown appealed would estimate him accordingly as that responsibility was discharged. Thus, in the two most memorable changes which affected his political career, the suddenness of his conversion may be traced to the wholly different aspect which the questions at issue assumed to his eyes when he had to weigh, as urgent and practical, the difficulties which had before presented themselves to his mind as remote and speculative, and when the gravity of the responsibility was transferred from others to himself.

None of the censures which Sir Robert Peel not unnaturally provoked appear to me to have been more erroneous than that which ascribed his political inconsistencies to moral timidity. Moral courage he must have possessed beyond most men, in twice deliberately resolving to excite and to brave that which, to one so sensitive, reserved, and proud, must have been the most bitter of all the calamities inflicted by party war — viz., the reproach of his own army for surrendering its standards and its staff to the enemy. What has passed for moral timidity was, in fact, an acute conscientiousness, heightened, it may be, by that strong sense of his own personal individuality which was one of his most

Digitized by Google

remarkable characteristics. It was a familiar observation in Parliament, that no public speaker ever so frequently introduced into his speeches the word "I." Egotistical, in the common — that is, in the harsh — sense of the word, he was not. I have no doubt that he had more kindly benevolence of heart than many men more demonstrative. But from his youth upwards he had been singled out for eminence above his contemporaries; and as he advanced in life and in fame he became more and more an individual power, distinct even from the principles which he represented. Many an honest temperate politician, caring little for Whig or Tory, turned to Sir Robert Peel for accurate information and safe opinion, as some nominal elector of a metropolitan district, too respectable or too apathetic ever to exercise his right of franchise, turns to the 'Times' newspaper when he wants to ascertain the funds in which a sagacious speculator should invest, or the creed which a practical politician should espouse. Sir Robert Peel was both a City Article and a Political Leader. Thus he could not fail to be impressed with a predominant consciousness of his own *Ego;* and wherever he looked on the surface of the public, that *Ego* was reflected as in a room lined with glass. The sense of personal responsibility was naturally increased with the consciousness of personal individuality. And when he pondered on duty, he asked himself not, "What is my duty to the party I lead?" but "What is the duty that I owe to myself — I, Sir Robert Peel?" But with that duty to himself he identified the duty that Sir Robert Peel, of all men living, owed to his country — "*Ego et Patria mea.*" And hence, whatever might be his errors as a political adviser and chief, History will

Digitized by Google

doubtless accord him one of those favoured places in her temple on which the light falls full on the noblest aspect of the image, leaving in shadow whatever outlines would less satisfy admiring eyes.

Men who weigh only what the occasion submits to them, always more impress a practical assembly than men who enter into subtle calculations of prospective contingencies. Before a legislative assembly the question is "Ay or No" — whether a certain something shall be done that night, and not whether a certain something may come to pass that night ten years! Those debaters, therefore, who weigh the reasons that immediately press for decision seem the only practical counsellors, the only safe guides for the present, even while they are confessing that they misjudged the past, and proving that they ignore the future.

Those, too, in whom the organ of weight is large generally make good administrators. For administration, in its ordinary routine, is but carrying on the customary operations of a machinery already at work. The organ of weight is indeed an invaluable faculty in what is called practical life. It is usually deficient in fervent reformers, eager innovators, enthusiasts of every kind, who, looking forward, often with accurate vision, to distant objects, lose sight altogether of the obstacles an inch before their eyes. It is as notably absent in a Garibaldi as it is largely developed in a Cavour. This organ is more generally wanting or inactive in women than in men. We see many women remarkable for discretion, and even for prevision, who nevertheless seem to lose their heads when they have to ponder on what must be immediately done. They are discreet, for they avoid difficulties as much as fate will permit;

Digitized by Google

they are far-seeing, for they will predicate correctly, even in passion, what will be the results of a course to which they are urged or allured. But when Fate, despite their discretion, surprises them by a difficulty, or when that which they foresaw at a distance has actually come to pass, their intellect seems paralysed, and they fly intuitively for counsel to the practical mind of a man. Although, in the course of my own experience and observation, I have seldom found the special faculty of weighing things immediate combined with the more abstract faculty of foreseeing and calculating on things afar, yet it by no means follows that the two faculties are so antagonistic as not to be combined. Only, where combined we recognise a very grand and consummate intellect; and intellects very grand and consummate are rare phenomena.

The combination must exist to a felicitous degree in great generals; in the founders or remodellers of states; in those who master the elements of revolution and establish dynasties. In more familiar life, the organ of weight predominates in men of business and action; the organ of causality in men of speculation and letters. In truth, the act of the statesman comes long after the thought of the writer, who, recommending such and such measures as theoretically sound, leaves it to the statesman to weigh the practical difficulties with which he, and not the writer, has to deal: so that, as Burke has shown with his usual subtlety of reasoning, the same man will advocate in writing what he may not deem it wise to execute in action.

This organ of weight appears to me more generally developed in the British than in any other civilised people. And in this, I think, there is perhaps the

Digitized by Google

main difference between them and their American kinsfolk. As a general rule, English men of business look with great intentness and caution to things immediately before them; and with great indifference, often with distrustful aversion, to things at a distance. Hence their dislike to theory; hence the emphatic respect they bestow on what they call practical sense; hence too, on the whole, the English are more disinclined to political novelties than any other population endowed with so large a degree of political freedom, so that even when accepting a political novelty, they still desire to accommodate it to the political habits of reasoning to which they are accustomed; and the advocates for innovation in whom they most confide, always endeavour to show that it is *not* the innovation which it appears at first sight, but is either a return to some elementary principle in the ancient constitution, or the natural and healthful development of that constitution itself. The English are mostly contented with seeking immediate remedies for immediate evils, and thus, from the dislike of foreseeing and preparing for changes that do not forcibly press, when they do concur in a change with sufficient force of numbers to carry it, it is with the same promptitude and haste which characterised the eminent man to whom I have referred, and who was in this, as in other respects, the archetype and representative of the English middle class of mind. Our American kinsfolk, on the other hand, to use their own phrase, are "a go-ahead" population. They look at distant objects with a more sanguine and eager ken than we of the Old World are disposed to do; they do not weigh the pros and cons which ought first to be placed in the

Digitized by Google

balance. And hence, perhaps, of all populations so intelligent, of which the history of the world contains a record, the Americans of the Great Republic have been in theory the boldest democrats, and in practice the most inveterate anti-reformers. There is not an absolute monarchy in Europe which has not been, within the last twenty years, a more practical reformer than the North American Republic; meaning by the word reformer, the corrector of the evils that grow out of a system of government which it is not intended to revolutionise. How many intelligent North Americans foresaw, long years ago, that the South would take its opportunity to separate from the North; and yet, when the South did separate, there does not seem to have been a North American statesman who could weigh the circumstances he had so long anticipated. And all the while the empire which the Americans already possessed was imperilled from visible causes, and none more visible than these — 1st, That its extent was already too vast for unity of interest; and, 2dly, That its government was too weak for unity of purpose, — the American citizens, fondly colonising Futurity, proclaimed, in every crisis of popular excitement, the Monroe doctrine, that the whole continent of America — the whole fourth-quarter of the globe — was the destined appanage of their Republic One and Indivisible.

Again, how common, within the last twenty years, has been the lament of intelligent Americans, that, by the working of their constitution, the highest order of citizens, whether in character, property, birth, or intellect, was eliminated from the action of public life. In how many pamphlets, lectures, orations, did not

Digitized by Google

reflective Americans mournfully foresee and solemnly foretell that, whenever the commonwealth should be really subjected to a critical danger, needing all its highest intellect to cope with and conquer, the incapable men would be thrown uppermost; yet for that evil, so long foreseen, not one practical remedy, even by those who foresaw it, was even suggested. Year after year, American thinkers have sent forth oracular warnings of the certain results of the jobbing and corruption which prevailed in all official departments, but never did the legislature enforce a remedy. In the struggle between North and South which wages while I write, all these anticipated evils are glaring, are prominent, in that great section of the people which maintains the principle of the Union — incapable generals, corrupt departments, jobbing everywhere — and not a single practical reform is suggested by a single statesman! Compare Russia and Austria with North America; to the two former States the ordeal of war made at once manifest their defects, and those defects they have ever since been labouring to reform. But will North America reform her defects when her war is over? As yet there is no sign of it. The main defect may be summed up very briefly — it is the prevalence of numbers over intellect and character; and until that balance can be made more even, North America will lack the organ of weight which is the essential faculty of the practical reformer. Monarchies, whether absolute or constitutional; republics, whether constitutional or democratical, engender the diseases peculiar to their own system, and their duration can only consist in calling forth the noblest conservative principle of each several system to the subjugation of the principles at

Digitized by Google

work to destroy it. It is perfectly clear that the noblest conservative principle in any State must be intellect accompanied with integrity. It is said by a great writer of the last century, that "honour is the principle of monarchies, virtue of republics;" and certainly a monarchy in which honour is effeminately ignored, is, whatever its wealth, as rotten as was the monarchy of Lydia; and a republic in which virtue is cynically depressed, is, whatever its freedom, as ripe for an ignoble grave as was the democracy of Corcyra.

For myself, I own frankly I have no prejudice against republics. In those countries in which there cannot exist what is commonly called aristocracy, but what I prefer to call a class of gentlemen, who, though they may have no hereditary titles or privileges, still constitute an order in the body politic, with leisure sufficient for high mental cultivation, with property sufficient for independence from mercenary calculations and sordid callings, with a root in the soil sufficient for a passionate resolve to defend its birthright of liberty, whether from foreigner, court, or mob, there must sooner or later be either an absolute rule, with all its military splendours and civil centralism of iron will, or a popular republic, with all its trading energies, and its wear and tear of passionate life. Were I the native of a land that presented to me only the option between these two, I think I should prefer the last. I would rather have been an Athenian even in the time of Demosthenes, than a Macedonian even in the time of Philip. And if I have no prejudice against republics, certainly I can have none against the Republic of America. Considering that men now living have seen its birth, who of the Old World can wonder at

Digitized by Google

the pride with which its citizens regard it? What other State in history ever rose, within a period measured by the life of a single man, into so great a power amongst the nations? On equal terms it has met the mightiest monarchies; no slow growth of progressive ages, it came into the world like America herself, a discovery which altered our knowledge of the globe, and dated the birth of a new destiny in the chronicle of the human race. Blind indeed the statesman who imagines its future darkened by the calamities it now undergoes. Divide the vast area of the land as fate may decide, be there in republican America as many independent sovereign States as in monarchical Europe, still the future of America, from the date of that disruption, must be as potent on the world as has been the past of Europe, whether disruptured by the fall of Rome or by the death of Charlemagne. Enough of pride for me, as an Englishman, to know that whatever State in that large section of the globe may best represent the dignity and progress of human thought, shall have had its fathers in Englishmen, and shall utter its edicts in the English tongue. I! a prejudice against Americans as Americans! — enough answer to that charge for me and my countrymen, that fathers have no natural prejudice against their children! It is only where Americans have represented some principle or passion utterly antagonistic to the ties of relationship, or where the faults which in them might be pardonable, and in us would be without excuse, have been recommended to our adoption, and, if adopted, would have insured our ruin, that we have formed not a prejudgment to their disfavour, but an after-judgment to our own vindication. But putting all relationship be-

Digitized by Google

tween ourselves and our kinsfolk out of the question, and making ourselves dispassionate observers of all that is going on in America, as it has gone on before in Europe — viz., the political separation of States geographically divided — I consider it a puerile peddling with all the issues at stake in one of the mightiest revolutions this earth has known, to consider that the process of disintegration can terminate with the separate empire of two divisions. As each State grows populous enough, and strong enough, and rich enough, to have interests distinct from other States with which for a time it is amalgamated, such State will split itself asunder, and America will have at least as many sovereignties as Europe. That is but a question of time, and time in America moves faster than it moved in Europe a thousand years ago. The practical question as concerns the future of America is this, Which of these several States, — partly by the accident of geographical situation, and principally by the operation, whether of the forms of government or the influences resulting from the spirit and modes of thought which compose the moral atmosphere of communities, — will obtain the largest share of dignity and power? So far as geography is concerned, the question is easily answered, That which is most central as regards influence over its neighbours, or that which has the widest seaboard as regards commerce with the foreigner — that which geographically most resembles France, or that which geographically most resembles England. So far as the spirit of institutions is concerned, that which gives the fairest play to the union of educated intellect with whatever moral principle — call it honour, patriotism, public virtue — may con-

Digitized by Google

centrate the educated intellect upon the disdain of private interest in comparison with the public weal; and create a Public Opinion, which, in the more favourable sense of the word aristocracy, may aristocratise the action of democracy, and demand in those who dominate its affairs the highest types of the national probity and culture.

I return from a digression which the interest that the destinies of republican America inspire in all political inquirers may suffice to excuse; serving, as it does to illustrate the propositions out of which it has grown.

As it is always well to secure a confidential adviser in one whose intellectual bias, differing from our own, tends to supply our defects; so, in the affairs of life, he who feels that his tendency of thought is over-much towards the speculative — who, rapt in prognostics of the future, does not heed the signs of the Moment slipping under his feet — will find his safety in habitually consulting one whose tendency is towards the practical, and who determines his plans by the weather of the day, rather than by meteorological calculations of the influences that will affect the barometer ten years hence; — so, on the other hand, he who, clear-sighted for things close before his eye, has a shortness of vision for things afar, should join to himself an adviser who, commanding a wider scope, not only expands, but rectifies his calculations, — not only elevates, but assures his aims.

The very highest order of common sense necessitates genius; the very highest order of genius necessitates common sense; but between the very highest order of

Digitized by Google

either there interpose numerous degrees of genius and of common sense.

How often have I seen a man of genius over-enthusiastic or over-refining, of whom I have said, "What a masterpiece of intellect that creature would be if he were but coupled to a sober, practical, business-like adviser, whose pace his agility indeed might quicken, but whose weight would hold him back from wasting his breath in capers, and bruising his thews in stumbles!"

And, on the other hand, how often have I seen a man singularly practical, whose common sense in all urgent matters, forced suddenly upon him, won ascendancy, for the moment, over more brilliant competitors, and who yet, from the want, whether of that warmth or that foresight, that ennobling aspiration towards lofty truths, or that cordial sympathy with the hearts and hopes of mankind, which give to genius its force and its charm, disappoints and deceives us in the long-run, incompleting his uses, stinting his wisdom, stopping short of that standard of greatness to which he might otherwise have grown: And again I have said to myself, "This man could have been the first of his age if he could have been as discerning for the age as he is acute for the moment; if his strong common sense had associated itself with some vivid comrade of genius, who would have brightened the eye and quickened the pulse of his reason."

For, after all, the mind of a master of action is consummate in proportion as it comprehends the two requisites in the mind of a master of science — viz., the cautious circumspection which attaches it to the

Digitized by Google

practical, and the active imagination which, out of the practical, ascends to the theoretical. A theory is an illusion, unless it be founded on the practical. The practical is fruitless unless it culminate in theory. Weight and causality are organs that should be in harmonious development with each other, whether in action or in contemplation: Facts immediately before us, being duly weighed, and traced to their causes in the past through calculations which suffice to justify those rational speculations on the future that constitute the theories of the philosopher and form the policy of the statesman.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

ESSAY XVII.

THE SYMPATHETIC TEMPERAMENT.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

THE SYMPATHETIC TEMPERAMENT.

It does not follow, because a man relieves a misfortune, that he sympathises with the sufferer. The stoics, indeed, while they enjoined beneficence, forbade sympathy: according to them, in putting your hand into your pockets you must take care not to disturb the folds of your heart. Rochefoucauld — who certainly was not a stoic, and may rather be considered the most brilliant of the modern followers of Epicurus — appears in this respect to be in agreement with Zeno. In the portrait of himself which he has sketched with the clear broad strokes of a master's hand, he says that "he is little sensible to pity; that there is nothing he would not do for a sufferer, even to the *show* of compassion, for the wretched are such fools, that the very show of compassion does them all the good in the world. But," adds this polite philosopher, "I hold that one should be contented to *show*, and guard one's self carefully from *feeling*, pity: it is a passion good for nothing in a well-constituted mind (*au dedans d'une âme bien-faite*), which only serves to weaken the heart, and which one ought to leave to the common people, who, doing nothing by reason, have need of passion to induce them to do anything."

Certainly most of us have known in life persons who are ever ready to perform a charitable action, but

Digitized by Google

from whose lips there never falls the balm of a sympathising word. They do not even, like Rochefoucauld, simulate the pity which they do not feel. Are you ill, and cannot afford a doctor? they will pay for him; are you pining for the anodyne of a tender look? you shrink back more sick at heart than before from the chill of their hard brows.

On the other hand, there are persons whose nervous system is tremulously alive to the aspect of pain; they will give you sigh for sigh, and groan for groan; they sympathise with you sincerely for the moment: as soon as you are out of sight, they forget that you exist. Put yourself in their way, and rely upon their sympathy; when out of their way, never count upon their aid. Benevolence is not always beneficence. To wish you may be benefited is one thing; to benefit you is another. A man who is beneficent without sympathy, though he may not be a pleasant acquaintance, must be a good man. But a man who is sympathising without beneficence may be a very bad man. For there is a readiness of sympathy which comes from the impressionability of the physical system — a vibration of the nerves reacting on no chord of duty, and awakening no response in a generous impulse of the heart. And a man may not be the less profoundly wicked because he possesses an excitable nervous temperament.

Alexander Pheræus, the most ruthless of tyrants, so entered into the sorrows enacted on the stage, that a tragedy moved him to tears. It is to him that Pope alludes in his Prologue to Addison's 'Cato' —

> "Tyrants no more their savage nature kept,
> And foes to virtue wondered why they wept."

Unfortunately, Alexander Pheræus, in spite of his

Digitized by Google

weeping, kept his "nature," which was probably not constitutionally "savage." A man of a temperament readily impressionable, if accompanied, as it generally is, with a lively fancy, brings home to himself the sorrows or the dangers which are represented to his senses, and for the moment realised by his fancy. And thus it may be from fear for himself that a tyrant may weep at the representation of sufferings which, on the stage, depicts the power of Fate over even the crowned head and the sceptred hand. Now the same nervous temperament which is effeminately susceptible to this egotistical kind of sympathy, may be very subject to fear; and fear is akin to cruelty. For fear is in the conviction of some weakness in him who feels it, compared with the power from which he apprehends an injury; and no saying is more true than that aphorism of Seneca, — "*Omnis enim ex infirmitate feritas est*" — "All cruelty springs from weakness." I think we have a striking example of these propositions in Nero, when his character is metaphysically analysed. His was the excitable, impulsive nervous organisation tremulously alive to the effects of music, poetry, the drama, *spectacle* — emotionally plastic to whatsoever influence appealed for the moment to his senses. Thus, in early youth, a cultivator of the softest arts, and no cause of suspicion and terror yet maddening his restless imagination, he was doubtless sincere when, the sentence on a criminal being brought to him to sign, he exclaimed, piteously, "*Vellem nescire literas!*" — "Would to Heaven that I had not learned to write!" But the same susceptibility to immediate influences which, when fresh from the contemplation of serene and harmless images, made him impulsively merciful,

Digitized by Google

subjugated him first to sensual pleasures, rendered monstrous in proportion as his imagination, on brooding over them, became itself diseased: and, when the whole character was unmanned by the predominance of the sensual and brute-like over the intellectual and moral elements in man, all that was noblest in manhood, in exciting the internal consciousness of his own infirmity or weakness, excited his fear; for in silently rebuking, they seemed silently to threaten him — and thus the voluptuous trifler was scared into the relentless butcher. Yet, impressionable to immediate circumstance at the last as at the first, all the compassionate softness he had once known for the sentenced criminal, whose doom he had shrunk from signing, returns to settle on himself. When the doom which had shocked his nerves to contemplate for another stands before him as his own, he weeps to behold, and his hand trembles to inflict it. Just as in his youth sympathy (being nothing more than the vividness with which he could bring home to his fancy the pain to be inflicted on another) made him forget the crime that was to be punished in pity for the criminal that was to be slain, so now he wholly lost sight of his own crimes in the anguish of contemplating his own death. And when, in forgetfulness of empire abused and in remembrance of art cultivated, he exclaimed, "What an artist in me is about to perish!"* he explained the enigma of his

* "*Qualis artifex pereo!*" *Artifex* means something more than musician, by which word it is rendered in our current translations, and even something more than artist, by which it is rendered in the text. *Artifex* means an artificer, a contriver; and I suspect that, in using the word, Nero was thinking of the hydraulic musical contrivance which had occupied his mind amidst all the terrors of the conspiracy which destroyed him — a contrivance that really seems to have been a very

Digitized by Google

own nature. Besides the tastes which his hostile historians accord to him in painting and sculpture, and a talent for poetry, which Suetonius is at some pains to vindicate from the charge of plagiarism, eighteen hundred laurel crowns had Athens bestowed on him as a musician! If his career had been a musician's and not an emperor's, he might indeed have been a voluptuary: a musician not unfrequently is; — but a soft-tempered, vain, praise-seeking infant of art, studying harmony, and nervously shocked by discord; — as musicians generally are.

The great French Revolution abounds with examples more familiar of the strange mixture of sentimental tenderness with remorseless cruelty, which may be found allied in that impressionable nervous temperament as susceptible to the *rapport* of the present time as a hysterical somnambule is to the will of an electro-biologist.

Many years ago I met with a Frenchman who had been an active, if subordinate, ministrant in the Reign of Terror. In Petitot's Collection of Papers illustrative of that period, we find him warmly commended to Robespierre, as a young patriot, ready to sacrifice on the altar of his country as many hecatombs of fellow-countrymen as the Goddess of Reason might require. When I saw this ex-official of the tribunal of blood, which was in a London drawing-room, where his antecedents were not generally known, he was a very polite, grey-haired gentleman of the old school of manners, addicted, like Cardinal Richelieu and Warren Hastings, to the composition of harmless verses. I

ingenious application of science to art, which we might not have lost if Nero had been only an artificer, and not an emperor.

Digitized by Google

have seldom met with any one who more instantaneously charmed a social circle by his rapid and instinctive sympathy with the humours of all around him — gay with the gay, serious with the serious, easy with the young, caressingly respectful to the old. Fascinated by the charm of his address, a fine lady whispered to me, "This, indeed, is that exquisite French manner of which we have heard so much, and seen so little. Nothing nowadays like the polish of the old *régime*."

Marvelling at the contrast between the actions for which this amiable gentleman had been commended to Robespierre and the manners by which he might have seduced the Furies, I could not refrain, in the frankness of my temper at that earlier period of my life, from insinuating the question how a man of so delicate a refinement, and so happy a turn for innocent poems in the style of "Gentil Bernard," could ever have been led away into a participation of what I mildly termed "the excesses of the Revolution."

"Ah," quoth this velvet-pawed tiger, "*que voulez-vous?* — I always obey my heart! I sympathise with whatever goes on before me. Am I to-day with people who cry '*A bas les aristocrates!*' *ça me monte la tête! ça m'échauffe le sang!* I cry out with them, '*A bas les aristocrates!*' Am I to-morrow with people who cry '*A bas la guillotine!*' — *eh bien!* my eyes moisten; I embrace my enemies — I sob out, '*A bas la guillotine!*' Sympathy is the law of my nature. Ah, if you had known Monsieur Robespierre!"

"Hem!" said I; "that is an honour I should not have coveted if I had lived in his day. But I have hitherto supposed that Monsieur Robespierre was somewhat unsocial, reserved, frigid; was he, never-

Digitized by Google

theless, a man whose sins against his kind are to be imputed to the liveliness of his sympathies?"

"Sir, pardon me if I say that you would not have asked that question if you had studied the causes of his ascendancy, or read with due attention his speeches. How can you suppose that a man not eloquent, as compared with his contemporaries, could have mastered his audience, except by sympathising with them? When they were for blood, he sympathised with them; when they began to desire the reign of blood to cease, he sympathised also. In his desk were found David's plans of academies for infancy and asylums for age. He was just about to inaugurate the Reign of Love, when the conspiracy against him swept him down the closing abyss of the Reign of Terror. He was only a day too late in expressing his sympathy with the change in the public mind. Can you suppose that he who, though ambitious, threw up his profession rather than subscribe to the punishment of death — he whose favourite author was Jean Jacques, '*le plus aimant des hommes*' — that he had any inherent propensity to cruelty? No! Cruelty had become the spirit of the time, with which the impressionability of his nervous temperament compelled him to sympathise. And if he were a sterner exterminator than others it was not because he was more cruel than they, but more exposed to danger. And as he identified himself with his country, so self-preservation was in his mind the rigorous duty of a patriot. Wherever you had placed him, Monsieur Robespierre would always have been the man of his day. If he had been an Englishman, sir, he would have been at the head of all the philanthropical societies — come in for

Digitized by Google

a large constituency on philanthropical principles — and been the most respectable, as he was always the most incorruptible, of public men. '*Ce pauvre M. Robespierre! comme il est méconnu!*' If he had but lived a month or two longer, he would have revived the age of gold!"

Certainly, during that excitable epoch, tenderness of sentiment and atrocity of conduct were not combined in "*ce pauvre M. Robespierre*" alone. The favourite amusement of one of the deadliest of his fellow-murderers was the *rearing of doves*. He said that the contemplation of their innocence made the charm of his existence, in consoling him for the wickedness of men. Couthon, at the commencement of the Revolution, was looked upon as the mildest creature to be found out of a pastoral. He had a *figure d'ange*, heavenly with compassionate tenderness. Even when he had attained to the height of his homicidal celebrity, he was carried to the National Assembly or the Jacobite Club (I say carried, for, though young, he had lost the use of his limbs) fondling little lapdogs, which he nestled in his bosom. An anecdote is told of one of his *confrères*, who was as fatal to men and as loving to dogs as himself, that when a distracted wife, who had pleaded to him in vain for her husband's life, in retiring from his presence, chanced to tread on his favourite spaniel's tail, he exclaimed, "Good heavens, madame! have you then no humanity?"

In these instances of tenderness for brutes we see the operation of that sympathy which, being diverted from men, still must have a vent, and lavishes itself on the inferior races, to whom its sentimental possessor shows all kindness, because from them he apprehends

Digitized by Google

no mischief. We need not, however, resort to the annals of the French Revolution for examples of this warped direction of pity or affection. Every day we see venerable spinsters who delight in the moral murder of scandal, and guillotine a reputation between every cup of tea, yet full of benignant charities to parrots, or dogs, or cats, or monkeys. Those venerable spinsters were, no doubt, once fond-hearted little girls, and, while in their teens, were as much shocked at the idea of assassinating the character of pretty women, and poisoning the honour of unsuspecting hearths, as they are now at the barbarity of pinching Fidele's delicate paw, or singeing Tabitha's inoffensive whiskers.

There is, then, a kind of morbid sensibility which is not affectation nor hypocrisy, as it is often esteemed, but is as perfectly genuine as any other symptom of irritable nerves, and is wholly distinct from healthful goodness of heart; and this kind of sensibility is often united with a temperament that is impressionable, through the nerves, to the influences immediately and sensuously brought to bear on it, and is so far sympathetic; but from that very impressionability is easily subjected to morbid or even criminal misdirections; for, as Adam Smith has very well argued in his 'Theory of Moral Sentiments' — "Sympathy, though its meaning was, perhaps, originally the same as pity or compassion, is a word that may now without much impropriety be made use of to denote our fellow-feeling with any passion whatever." And the reader will have observed that it is in that sense that I employ the word. A person thus nervously impressionable may, from the very intensity of his regard for himself, easily transport his fancy to the situation of others, so long as he can

Digitized by Google

picture himself in those situations, or so long as they appear to affect his comfort or safety. And what with the impressionability, what with the fancy, what with the self-regard, he will be peculiarly susceptible to fear, and fear will render him peculiarly prone to cruelty. Yet, with all that evinces hardness of heart, he may retain to the last a certain softness and sensibility of nerves — weep like the tyrant of Pheræa at the sorrow in a play, fondle lapdogs like Couthon — in short, while the masculine attributes of humanity seem obliterated, we shall find him human through a morbidity of sentiment which belongs to the humanity of women.

Still, though this impressionable organisation is not therefore necessarily an index of goodness, it is much more frequent in the good than in the bad. I have hitherto glanced only at its diseased conditions. In its healthful development and action it imparts to virtue that exquisite tenderness which distinguishes the archetype of beautified humanity from that artificial mechanism by which the stoic sought to fashion forth a compassionless, emotionless, ethical machine.

When the beneficent man seems to feel not only for but with the fellow-creature he benefits, enters into his heart, steals away the pride that might otherwise reject a charity, whispers hope to the grief that might otherwise despair of comfort, makes himself one with his brother man, through sympathy, before soaring aloft from him as the dispenser of favours through a principle of the duty which the prosperous owe to the afflicted — then Virtue indeed seems clad in the alluring beauty which Plato says she would take in the eyes of man, could her image be rendered visible.

Digitized by Google

Beneficence in itself is godlike; but beneficence alone is but a godlike statue — an effigies embodying a divine idea, but an effigies in marble. Add to beneficence sympathy, and the statue takes bloom and life. Nor in beneficence alone has sympathy its heavenly charm. In the equal commerce of life the benefactor is needed seldom, the sympathiser is longed for always. Be our joy but in a momentary sunbeam, be our sadness but the gloom of a passing cloud, how that sunbeam lights up the whole landscape when reflected in the sympathiser's smile, and how the cloud, when its shadow falls on the sympathiser's brow, "turns forth its silver lining on the night!" Happy, thrice happy he who has secured to his life one who feels as if living in it! And perhaps this is not an uncommon lot, except to uncommon natures. Did Shakespeare and Milton find hearts that understood the mysterious depths of their own well enough to sympathise? If so, it does not appear in their scant, yet (for such knowledge perhaps) their sufficing biographies. But Shakespeares and Miltons are as medals, by which Nature celebrates her most signal triumphs, and of which she coins no duplicates. Doubtless there are millions of excellent Browns and Smiths who may find second selves in other Browns and other Smiths. Goethe, speaking of himself, says, with that manly yet somewhat mournful self-dependence which forms one of his most impressive characteristics, "To desire that others should sympathise with us is a great folly. I never desired any such thing. I always considered man, in his individual capacity, a being to be inquired into and observed in all his peculiarities, but I certainly did not expect any sympathy." Folly

Digitized by Google

or not the desire of sympathy may be, but perhaps it is the desire strongest and most common in youthful poets. Their ideal of love is indeed, for the most part, shaped and coloured by their craving for that sympathy which they imagine the beloved one alone can give. Yet certainly Goethe, speaking as Goethe, is right. No one has a right to expect sympathy for himself as poet, as author, or artist; for, in that capacity, his life is in a world of his own, with which no other is familiar — into which no other can find a home. In that world there goes on a perpetual movement — a rapid succession of scenes and images, of incidents and events, of which he is as sole a spectator, as if to him alone were vouchsafed the vision of all that inhabit and interest the star which was ascendant at his birth, and influences the structure of his mind and the mysteries of his fate.

But no one is all poet, author, artist; every demigod of genius has also his side as man. And as man, though not as poet, author, artist, he may reasonably yearn for sympathy. Such a sympathy, so restricted, will probably not be denied to him. It has been said that the wife of Racine had so little participation in the artistic life of her spouse, that she had never even read his plays. But as Racine was tenderly attached to her, and of a nature too sensitive not to have needed some sort of sympathy in those to whom he attached himself, and as, by all accounts, his marriage was a very happy one, so it is fair to presume that the sympathy withheld from his artistic life was maintained in the familiar domestic everyday relationship of his positive existence, and that he did not ask the heart of Madame Racine to beat in unison with his

Digitized by Google

own over the growing beauties of those children whom she was not needed to bring into the world. Why ask her to shed a mother's tears over the fate of *Britannicus*, or recoil with a mother's horror from the guilt of *Phèdre?* — they were no offspring of hers. Men of action have, however, this decided advantage over men of letters and contemplation, that as their objects cannot be achieved without the association and aid of others, so they secure sympathy to their intellectual no less than to their materialistic being. The sympathy of thousands, of millions, goes with each movement of genius in a great leader of action, be he a captain in war or a counsellor in peace. For action influences the outward and immediate fortunes of men and where self-interest hangs on another, there egotism itself engenders sympathy. Doubtless there were thousands in England who felt much in common with Cromwell's secretary, where there was one who felt in common with the blind schoolmaster composing 'Paradise Lost.'

Therefore, not only for extension of human knowledge, but for interchange of healthful emotion, I have always thought it well for the man whose main pursuit must be carried on through solitary contemplation, to force himself to some active interest in common with ordinary mortals, even though it be but in the culture of a farm. He will be more reconciled to the utter want of sympathy in the process by which the germ of a thought grows up into flower within his own secret mind, if, when he goes into the marketplace, he finds and reciprocates abundant sympathy in the effect of the weather on hay and barley.

And though the poet may not find sympathy from

Digitized by Google

others in all that pertains to himself exclusively as poet, yet he must have sympathy with others in what they think, feel, and do, or in the world of that art which, amidst the cool of its sequestered groves and its choirs of ideal beings, separates him from the crowd, he will never so soar from the earth as to strike the stars. Horace, from whom I have just been stealing the thoughts, as gypsies steal the children of the rich, exchanging their fine garments for humble rags — Horace is himself an illustration of the truth I would enforce. For what deep and lively interest in all that concerns his age, his land — what stores of knowledge gathered from practical commune with mankind animate and enrich the songs conceived amidst the solitudes of Ustica! Genius in the poet, like the nomad of Arabia, ever a wanderer, still ever makes a home where the well or the palm-tree invites it to pitch the tent. Perpetually passing out of himself and his own positive circumstantial condition of being into other hearts and into other conditions, the poet obtains his knowledge of human life by transporting his own life into the lives of others. He who would create a character must, while creating, move and breathe in his own creation — he who would express a passion must, while expressing, feel his own heart beating in the type of man which the passion individualises and incarnates; thus sympathy is to the poet the indispensable element of his knowledge. Before he has experience of the actual world of men, he establishes his inquisitive impassioned sympathy with Nature; affected by her varying aspects with vague melancholy or mysterious joy. Thus, all great poets commence with lively and sensuous impressionability

Digitized by Google

to natural objects and phenomena, though the highest order of poets, in proportion as life unfolds itself, ascend from sympathy with groves and streams to sympathy with the noblest image of the Maker — spiritual, immortal Man! and man's character and man's passions, man's place and fate in creation, move and interest their genius in maturer years, as in childhood it was moved by the whisper of winds, the tremor of leaves, the play of the glinting sunbeam, the gloom of the darkening cloud. Schiller in his exquisite poem 'Die Ideale' ('The Ideals'), speaks of a time in his grand career "*past away* with the suns that gilt the path of his youth." "When to me," he exclaims — "when to me lived the tree, the rose; when to me sang the silver fall of the fountain; when from the echo of my life the soulless itself took feeling." But in the fuller and ampler development of his ever-progressive genius, Schiller passes onward, from the Ideals alone, to sing the 'Ideal and Life' ('Das Ideal und das Leben'); and in this poem, which constitutes the core of his last completest philosophy, the two existences unite in the crowning result of perfected art, life yielding the materials through which the Ideal accomplishes its archetypal form. From life the raw block is laboriously lifted out of the mine that imbedded it, stroke by stroke sculptured into the shape which may clothe an idea, until the final touch of the chisel leaves the thought disengaged from the matter, and the block, hewn from Nature, takes from Art both its form and its soul.

In Oratory, which has, in its essence, much that is akin to Poetry, though, as it should never depart from the practical, it differs from poetry in substance as

Digitized by Google

well as in the mode of expression — in oratory, who does not observe how much success depends on the sympathy which the orator must feel in his audience before he can extort it from them? It was thus once very truthfully and very finely said by Mr. Pitt, in answer to the complimentary charge that his eloquence deceived and led away the assembly, he addressed, "Eloquence is in the assembly, not in the speaker" — meaning thereby that the speaker is effective in proportion as he gives utterance to the thought or the feeling which prevails in the assembly.

As the sympathetic temperament lends grace and lovability to virtue, and is the normal constitution of genius; so, in the ordinary social world, it is generally found strongly evinced in those who please universally. But in them, the brilliant playmates of society, seizing and reflecting the interest which occupies the moment, — the gift, unregulated by the genius which extracts permanent uses from fleeting impressions, or undisciplined by the virtue which habitually links sympathetic impulses into the harmony of benignant conduct, may lead those who possess it into frivolities and errors, just as it has led men with nerves irritably weak and fancies morbidly restless into the gravest crimes; — sympathy being thus reduced to an overfacile impressionability to the examples and circumstances that immediately affect the sympathiser.

The elegant Alcibiades of the drawing-room, who can at once make himself at home in every circle, only obtains his social success through the quickness of his constitutional sympathy with the humours of those around him — passing from each to each with a rapidity which, to men engaged in graver thought,

Digitized by Google

seems like a mental sleight-of-hand. The ready admiration which follows this pleasing talent for society too often allures its possessor from steadfast devotion to objects for which labour is needed, and to which all returns in praise must be far more slow in coming, and far less cordially given when they do come. Hence persons singularly agreeable in all those mixed societies which combine for the purpose of holiday amusement or relaxation, do not often achieve that solid distinction which is obtained by men on whom nature has less generously bestowed the endowments of which the charmers of society are the amiable spendthrifts.

The touching and exquisitely beautiful line in which Cowley alludes to the unprofitable favour of the Muses, applies (at all events nowadays) with far more truth to the Graces —

"Where once such fairies dance no grass doth ever grow."

The darlings of the drawing-room are those whom the dispensers of official power are delighted to meet — are those of whom the most respectable members of the class that form public opinion are proud to gossip; but do they aim at anything solid — any position which official power can give, and public opinion ratify — the dullest drone who, at all events, comes out of a hive, has a better chance of obtaining credit for industry than the dazzling butterflies whom we only know as the flutterers over flowers. Precisely because we so contentedly allow a drawing-room value to the man whose sympathies with the drawing-room are more vivid than ours, we believe that out of the drawing-room he counts as zero. Hence his *amour propre* courted by the highest in directions which cost him no

Digitized by Google

trouble, rebuffed, by the highest and lowest alike, in directions which would cost him a great deal of trouble, this favourite of the Graces accommodates his ambition to those successes with which graver men do not vie, and which graver men do not envy, simply because they look on such triumphs as certain indications of failure in the objects which they covet for themselves. They continue their own course with a steadfast eye to the goal, and, looking back, cast a gracious smile on the male Atalantas who could indeed outstrip them by a bound, but who halt in the race to pick up the golden apples.

Therefore, I say to every young man at that critical age in which we are all most impressionable to immediate influences, most sympathising with fugitive emotions, "Consider within yourself what it is that you really covet! What is it that constitutes such a want, whether in your intellectual or your moral being, as you must more or less satisfy, or your whole life will be one regret? Is it for a something to be won through competition with those who, in Academe, Forum, or Mart, do the business of this world; or through a superior grace in the attitude you assume among its idlers? The one object necessitates labour — the other is best gained by ease. Alcibiades himself could not unite both. Look at Alcibiades — consider all that birth, fortune, beauty, genius gave to him; and does history record a career more incomplete, a renown more equivocal? Take your choice — do not seek to unite life's business with life's holiday. Each may have place in turn; but remember that the business leads to distinction, and the holiday away from it."

Still, I do not profess, in this or in any matter, to

Digitized by Google

demand from all varieties of mind and position, monotonous conformity to an arbitrary standard. The vast majority of men can afford few holidays after they leave school; but there are others to whom, on leaving school, all life becomes one holiday. A really fine gentleman, though he be nothing more than a fine gentleman, is a creature to be admired — he is one of the lilies of the field who toil not, neither do they spin; yet, if the corn-sheaves have their value, the lilies have their glory. A man who has no object and no ambition except to charm, is certainly a much more attractive object in creation than a man who has no object and no ambition at all, unless it be to offend. Despise a lily as you will, you would rather have in your garden a lily than a nettle.

The Italians, among whom natural grace and charm of manner are more generally diffused than among any other people with whom it has been my lot to have intercourse, possess a familiar word by which they denote a person peculiarly lovable and agreeable — "*simpatico;*" viz., a person with whom you can reciprocate sympathy. And to him whose range extends no wider than a well-bred society — in which it is no blamable ambition to wish for affection or applause — I recommend an attentive study of all that is signified in that soft Italian word.

Finally, then, the impressionable sympathetic temperament has its good or its evil in proportion to the strength or infirmity of the character in which it is found, and the healthful or morbific nature of the influences to which it is the more habitually subjected; resembling in this respect those figures in astrology which take their signification from the signs with which

Digitized by Google

they are conjoined — doubling evil if conjoined to evil, doubling good if conjoined to good.

It may, indeed, be said that sympathy exists in all minds, as Faraday has discovered that magnetism exists in all metals; but a certain temperature is required to develop the hidden property, whether in the metal or the mind.

Digitized by Google

ESSAY XVIII.

FAITH AND CHARITY: OR, THE UNION, IN PRACTICAL LIFE, OF SINCERITY AND CONCILIATION.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

FAITH AND CHARITY: OR, THE UNION, IN PRACTICAL LIFE, OF SINCERITY AND CONCILIATION.

If the New Testament were divested of its sacred character, what depths of wisdom thinkers would still discover in the spirit of its precepts! That insistance upon Faith as an all-important element of man's spiritual nature, to which some philosophers have directed their assaults, philosophers more noble and profound would then recognise as essential, not more to the religion that claims it, than to the unfolding and uplifting of all our noblest faculties and powers. For when we come to consider our intellectual organisation, we find that, for all our achievements, there is an absolute necessity of faith in something not yet actually proved by our experience, and that something involves an archetype of grandeur, or nobleness, or beauty, towards which each thought that leads on to a higher thought insensibly aspires. Before even a mechanician, proceeding step by step through the linked problems of mathematical science, can arrive at a new invention, he must have faith in a truth not yet proved; for that which has already been proved cannot be an invention. It is the same with every original poet and artist — he must have faith in a possible beauty not yet made visible on earth, before that beauty for the first time

Digitized by Google

dawns on his verse or blooms on his canvas. It is the same, perhaps yet more remarkably, with every great man of action — with the hero, the statesman, the patriot, the reformer. "Nemo vir magnus sine aliquo afflatu divino unquam." I may add, that no one whom that divine *afflatus* inspired ever failed to believe in it. Thus faith, which is demanded for a religion, and without which, indeed, a religion could not exist, is but the kindling of that sacred particle of fire which does not confine its light and its warmth to the altar on which it glows. And where that faith is first, as it were, pledged to the sublimest and loveliest ideals which man's imagination can conceive — viz., the omnipresence of a Creator who permits us to call him Father, and the assurance of an immortality more confirmed by our own capacities to comprehend and aspire to it, than it would be if, without such capacities, a ghost appeared at our bedside every night to proclaim it; for would a ghost make a dog believe he was immortal? — where, I say, faith is first pledged to those beliefs which, with few exceptions, the highest orders of human intellect have embraced, it is the property of that faith, if it be not corrupted into superstition nor incensed into fanaticism, to communicate a kindred nobleness to all other ideals conceived in the quickened heart and approached by the soaring genius. Nay, even where men of considerable mental powers have entirely rejected all religious belief, and, so far as a soul and a Deity are concerned, refused to suffer a thought to escape from the leading-strings of that over-timorous Reason which, if alone consulted, would keep us babies to our grave — those men have invariably been compelled, by the instincts of their intellect, to have faith

Digitized by Google

in something else not proven, not provable, much more hard to believe than the wonders they put aside as incredible. Lucretius has faith in the fortuitous concurrence of his atoms, and Laplace in his crotchet of Nebulosity. Neither those theories, nor any theory which the mind of man can devise, could start fully into day without faith in some truths that lie yet among shadows unpierced by experience; and therefore, to all philosophy as to all fancy, to all art, to all civilisation, faith in that which, if divined by the imagination, is not among the facts to which the reason confines its scope, is the restless, productive, vivifying, indispensable principle. And there would be an unspeakable wisdom in writings, even were they not inspired, which lend to this principle of faith a definite guidance towards certain simple propositions, easily comprehended by an infant or a letterless peasant; and which, if argued against, certainly cannot be disproved, by the ablest casuists; — propositions which tend to give a sense of support and consolation under grief, hope amidst the terrors of despair, and place before the mind, in all conceivable situations, an image of ineffable patience, fortitude, self-sacrifice — which, in commanding our reverence, still enthralls our love and invites our imitation. Thus Faith, steadied and converged towards distinct objects beyond the realm of the senses, loses itself no more among the phantom shadows of the Unknown and Unconjecturable, but is left free to its worldly uses in this positive world — believing always in some truth for the morrow beyond the truth of the day, and thus advancing the gradual march of science; believing in types of beauty not yet reduced to form, and thus winning out of nature new

Digitized by Google

creations of art; believing in the utility of virtues for which there is no earthly reward — in the grandeur of duties which are not enforced by the law — in the impulse to deeds which annihilate even the care for self-preservation, and conduct to noble, and yet, perhaps, to fameless graves, and thus invigorating and recruiting the life of races by millions of crownless martyrs and unrecorded heroes. Strike from Mankind the Principle of Faith, and men would have no more history than a flock of sheep.

But it is the common perversion of faith, if left unchastised, uncounterbalanced, to embitter itself into intolerance. This is not fairly to be alleged against religion alone, as many satirical writers have done; it is the same with faith in all other varieties of form. Nay, the most intolerant men I have ever known in my life have been men of no religion whatsoever; who, having an intense faith in the sincerity and wisdom of their own irreligion, treat those who dissent from their conclusions as simpletons or impostors. "One would fancy," says Addison, with elegant irony, "that the zealots in atheism would be exempt from the single fault which seems to grow out of the imprudent fervour of religion. But so it is, that irreligion is propagated with as much fierceness and contention, wrath and indignation, as if the safety of mankind depended upon it."

In politics, what can be so intolerant as party-spirit when it runs high? But when it runs high it is sincere. Faith has entered into the conflict: the combatants have quite forgotten that the object clear to the cooler bystanders, is to put some men out of office and others into it; they have conscientiously convinced themselves

Digitized by Google

of the worthiness of their own cause, and the infamy of their opponents'. Regarded on one side, antagonists are bigots and tyrants; on the other side, antagonists are cheats or incendiaries.

Art and science have also their intolerance. Hear the orthodox physician talk of his innovating brother! No coarser libels have been written than those in scientific journals against a professor of science. In art, an artist forms his theories and his school, and has an enthusiast's faith in their indubitable superiority: the artist of a different school he regards as a Goth. One of the mildest poets I ever knew, who had nurtured his own harmless muse in the meek Helicon of Wordsworth, never could hear Lord Byron praised, nor even quoted, without transports of anger. I once nearly lost one of the dearest friends I possess, by indiscreetly observing that the delineation of passion was essential to the highest order of poets, simply because he had formed a notion, in the rectitude of which he had the strongest good faith, that perfect poetry should be perfectly passionless. I am not sure, indeed, whether there be not, nowadays, a more vehement bigotry in matters of taste than in those of opinion. For so much has been said and written about toleration as regards opinion, that in that respect the fear of not seeming enlightened preserves many from being uncharitable. But, on the contrary, so much is every day said and written which favours intolerance in matters of taste, that it seems enlightened to libel the whole mental and moral composition of the man whose taste is opposed to your own. I have known language applied to a difference of taste on the merits of a poet, a novelist, nay, even an actor, which the

Digitized by Google

Bishop of Exeter would not venture to apply to Tom Paine.

In a word, there is scarcely anything in which a man has a deep and conscientious faith, but what he is liable to be very intolerant to the man who shocks that faith by an antagonistic faith of his own. And if this general truth be more flagrantly noticeable in religious beliefs than in any other, it is not only because a man who believes in his religion holds it the most valuable of all his intellectual title-deeds, but also because a larger number of men concur in a religious belief than they do upon any other debatable point.

In the New Testament, however, Faith is not left without a softening adviser, and Charity is placed by her side — Charity, with which Intolerance is impossible. For while so impressively insisting upon faith, our Saviour not less impressively reserves the right of judgment to Himself, the Unerring and Divine; and to man, whose faculty of judging must be, like man himself, erring and human, He says imperatively, "Judge not, that ye be not judged." Now, of all our offences, it is clear that that offence of which man can be the least competent judge is an offence of defective faith. For faith belongs to our innermost hearts, and not to our overt actions. And religious faith is therefore that express tribute to the only Reader of all hearts, on the value of which man can never, without arrogant presumption, set himself up as judge.

And the whole spirit and letter of the Gospel so enforce the duty of brotherly love, that the harshness with which man is disposed to regard the fellow-man whose doctrine differs from his own, has in that commandment of love a perpetual mitigator and sweetener.

Digitized by Google

When the scribe asked our Lord, "What is the First Commandment of all?" our Lord was not contented with stating the First Commandment alone — viz., that which enjoins the love of God — but emphatically added a Second Commandment, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." The First Commandment includes religious faith; for who can love what he does not believe in? The Second Commandment includes all which can keep faith safe from bigotry; for what man, except a maniac, would torment and persecute *himself* for a difference of opinion from another?

It is thus that, by a benignant omniscience of the human heart in its strength and its weakness, Faith is enjoined as a habit of mind essential to all mental achievement as to all moral grandeur, while the asperities to which sincere faith, not in religion alone, but in all doctrines that the believer considers valuable, down to a dogma in politics or a canon in taste, are assuaged in him who has formed the habit of loving his neighbour as himself, and disciplining his whole conduct by the exquisite justice which grows out of the observance of that harmonising rule.

Now it is only with the worldly uses which are suggested by the divine Second Commandment — deduced from it as corollaries are from a problem, or as problems themselves are deduced from an axiom — that I have to deal in the remarks I submit to the reader on the Wisdom of Conciliation.

This wisdom, which is the one we appear the most to neglect, whether in public or private life, is nevertheless that which, where it is practised, is attended with the most auspicious results.

Take, first, the strife of parties. The men who

Digitized by Google

admit into faith no soothing element of brotherly love, are, no matter how sincere or how eloquent, the worst enemies to the party they espouse, and in critical periods of history have been the destroyers of states, and the subverters of the causes they espouse. It is with truth that the philosophical apologists for the excesses of popular revolutions have contended that timely reforms, yielded to reason, would have prevented the revolutions subsequently made in wrath. But it is a truth quite as notable, yet far less frequently insisted upon, that revolutions made in wrath do not secure their object. There is a stage in all popular movements at which to stop short is the surest victory, and from which all advance forward is certain to create reaction. Like the bad poet ridiculed by Boileau, the fanatical reformer,

> "En poursuivant Moïse au travers des deserts,
> Court avec Pharaon se noyer dans les mers."

In all contests of party there are many stages in which conciliation is obviously the wisest policy for both; and where that policy is rejected, sooner or later the conciliator appears, though in the form of a master. He conciliates the strife of parties by suppressing it. The fortunate dictator, under whatever name he may be called, is in fact always, to the bulk of the people, the representative of compromise — a power grown out of the disorders of other powers — the supremacy of which preserves each faction from the domination of its rivals, and secures to the community that repose which the leaders of the factions had refused to effect by conciliations between themselves. Thus in truth rose Augustus, Cromwell, and either Napoleon, the First and Third. In the rise of

Digitized by Google

each of these sovereign arbiters, there was, in fact, a compromise. The old system of authority was sacrificed to the passions begotten by opposition to it. The system of freedom, to which the old authority had been obnoxious, was sacrificed to the fears which its violence had created. And if, on the whole, in this compromise, the abstract principle of liberty lost more than the abstract principle of authority, it is because, in all prolonged and embittered contests between liberty and order, order is sure ultimately to get the better; for liberty is indeed the noblest luxury of states, but order is the absolute necessity of their existence.

In the more peaceful and normal contests of party, a small minority of thoughtful men, who interpose between extremes, will generally contrive to possess themselves of power. This is remarkably the case in the British Parliament. For there is a strange peculiarity in English public life — the opinions most popular on the hustings are not those which the public, in its heart, desires to see carried into effect in administration. On the one side, the greater number of representatives consists of those who profess reforms which cannot be achieved; on the other side, the greater number are those who the most strenuously denounce the changes which must inevitably take place. To judge by the temper of constituencies, a compromise would be impossible; the nation must be governed by the opinions which obtain the triumph on the hustings. But, the election once over, it is the few temperate men, whose temperance finds small favour at the hustings, who obtain the confidence of the public and the ear of Parliament.

But there is one essential to the success of moderate

Digitized by Google

councillors; they must be not less in earnest than the vehement ones. Insincerity is often excused to passion, but never to moderation. For it is allowed, with a good-natured if contemptuous indulgence, that men in a passion, often saying more than they intend, must as often unsay what they have said; and insincerity in them seems less want of truth than defect of judgment. But the moderate man is the calm man, who thinks deliberately for himself before he delivers the opinion on which others rely; and insincerity in him seems deliberate fraud. Let it be plainly understood, that to conciliate men is not to abandon principles. It is quite possible in public life, as in private, to be conciliatory and yet firm. In order to be so, it is necessary to discriminate between those things that will not admit of compromise consistently with honour to the advocate and safety to the cause, and those things that, in the perpetual flux and reflux of human affairs, belong essentially to the policy of compromise — compromise being the normal necessity of free states, which would rapidly perish if the feuds they engender were wholly irreconcilable. We talk of times of transition, as if transition were the peculiarity of a time, whereas in every progressive state all times are times of transition. The statesman who cannot comprehend this truth, is always exposed to the charge either of impracticability or of treason. If he exclaims, "No compromise!" in things that admit of compromise, he must constantly find himself in the attitude either of unavailing resistance or of ignominious surrender; in either case he will not be a safe guide. A truly wise politician, espousing a cause with sincere devotion, will as sparingly as possible pledge himself against Cir-

Digitized by Google

cumstance and Time; for these are the great Powers of Mutability, which he must take into every prudent calculation if he would do the best he can for his cause. The archer who would be sure of his mark must allow for the wind. Nevertheless, in every cause there are certain elementary principles not to be abandoned, and for the ultimate benefit of which even a temporary, if a brave, defeat is better than a pusillanimous concession. Still, even in such cases, it is astonishing how much a conciliatory manner can disarm, nay sometimes convert, opponents, and preserve authority to resistance and dignity to defeat. No one overcomes the difficulties in his way by acridity and spleen. Hannibal, in spite of the legend, did *not* dissolve the Alps by vinegar. Power is so characteristically calm, that calmness in itself has the aspect of power. And forbearance implies strength. The orator who is known to have at his command all the weapons of invective, is most formidable when most courteous. We admit and admire philippics where there is a Philip to be denounced and a Demosthenes to harangue; yet, after all, even the philippics of a Demosthenes had no effect against Philip.

But it is in private life that the prudence of conciliation is most visible and most needed. We feel this every day. If we have some unpleasant dispute in which we need a negotiator, we shrink from committing our cause to a blustering irascible friend; we look out for an intermediator of conciliatory manner and temper. And if he think us in the right, we feel sure that he will not want the necessary firmness in all that is really important. He may insure us what is important by the sweetness with which he may

Digitized by Google

concede what is insignificant. The conciliatory negotiator makes the adversary ashamed of violence.

In families well ordered there is always one firm sweet temper, which controls without seeming to dictate. The Greeks represent Persuasion as crowned.

The essence of all fine breeding is in the gift of conciliation. A man who possesses every other title to our respect except that of courtesy is in danger of forfeiting them all. A rude manner renders its owner always liable to affront. He is never without dignity who avoids wounding the dignity of others.

Plantagenet Pungent is an exceedingly clever man; he has high birth, a great fortune, a character without stain. He divests himself of these attributes of command, and enters society as an epigrammatist looking round for a subject. He selects his butt, and lets fly his arrows; the bystanders laugh; but it is not a pleasurable laughter. Each man feels that his turn may come next. Plantagenet Pungent has no doubt a social reputation for caustic wit; and for that very reason all his loftier claims to consideration are ignored or grudged; and once a-week, at least, he provokes some rebuff which is heartily enjoyed by the bystanders, whether they laugh openly or in their sleeves. If without provocation you strike a drayman in a crowd, though you be a prince of the blood-royal, you put yourself on his level; and if the drayman thrash your royal highness, he will be the better man of the two.

Scaliger Blount is an eminent example of a more solid sort of obnoxious ability. He has prodigious learning and a still more prodigious memory, both of which he brings into ruthless activity by the goad of a combative disposition. He takes a cruel joy in set-

Digitized by Google

ting everybody right. Are you a bashful man, talking in friendly whispers to your next neighbour at some crowded dinner-table? Scaliger Blount is sure to overhear you misdate an event or misquote an authority. Pounce he descends on you across the table, drags your blunder into general notice, corrects it with terrible precision, and flings it back to you where you sit, blushing with shame and rage, every eye riveted on your confusion! Scaliger Blount is an universal contradictor. He spares neither age nor sex; the cloth itself has no sanctity in his eyes. He would rather contradict a bishop than any other man, except an archbishop — especially if it be on a matter of theology or church discipline. As all opinions have two sides, whatever side you take, he is sure to take the other; and his pre-eminent delight is in setting you down in your own proper department, whatever that may be. Are you an artist, and venture a remark upon colouring? beware of Scaliger Blount. He knows all about colouring that man ever wrote on it, and you are sure to hear from him, "Sir, I disagree." Are you a lawyer, and, as you think, safely laying down the law to reverential listeners? beware of Scaliger Blount; he has the laws of all times, from Confucius to Lord St. Leonards, at his fingers' ends, and woe to you when you see him knit his brows and exclaim, "I differ!" But though no one can deny the learning of this *helluo librorum*, the common-sense of the common interest unites all diners-out against conceding respect to it. Instead of saying "Learned man," one says "Insufferable savage." Nobody acknowledges as an authority him who arrogates authority over all. Each prudent host, in making up his cards for a din-

Digitized by Google

ner-party, pauses a moment at the name of Scaliger Blount, and shuffles this human cyclopædia out of the pack, muttering the damning monosyllable, "Bore."

But when Urban Frankland is in the social circle, every one recognises the enchanter. His birth and fortune are but those of a simple gentleman, yet he has an influence denied to dukes. His knowledge is extensive, but with him *literæ* are indeed *humaniores*. His natural intellect is of the highest, but it is reserved for fitting time and occasion. That which distinguishes him in society is charm, and the secret of that charm is a manly suavity. He has no pretensions to the artificial elegance which Lord Chesterfield commends to his votaries; he has no gallant compliments for the ladies, with whom he is not the less a favourite; he has a cordial laugh, but it is never heard at the expense of others. The frankness of his nature and the warmth of his heart have on various occasions in life led him into errors or difficulties which might have exposed him to much truculent attack; but, as he has been ever forbearing to the imprudences of others, so others, by a tacit consent, have been forbearing to his. Malevolence gains no hearing against him. The love that he wins for his gentler qualities, begets a reverence for his higher ones. Of all the men I ever knew, none more securely get their own way — none have so kingly an authority over those with whom they live. And I suspect the main reason to be this, that every one's self-love is so secure of a wound from him that it identifies its own protection with his pre-eminence: And yet I know no man more truthful. Indeed, it is a maxim of his, that "Where there is no candour there can be no conciliation." "Sincerity,"

Digitized by Google

says Tillotson, "is an excellent instrument for the speedy despatch of business." Certainly, as faith and charity should go together, so we should never care much for a man's mildness if we had not a thorough belief in his honour; nor accept as a mediator or peacemaker him whom we did not know to have such reverence for honour in the abstract, that he would never persuade us to dishonourable concessions, whether he were employed for or against us.

The wisdom of conciliation is visible even in literature. The writers who please us most, to whom we return the most often, are the writers who create agreeable sensations; and certainly foremost amongst agreeable sensations are those which reconcile us to life and humanity. It requires but a small comparative exertion of talent in a writer who smoothes down the natural grain of the heart, to that which is required in one who rubs it all the wrong way. Hence the universal charm of Horace; hence our delight in the kindly laugh of Cervantes, and the good-tempered smile of Le Sage; hence the enviable immortality of Addison and Goldsmith. Certainly none of these writers spare our follies or our errors; they are sufficiently frank and plain-spoken, but they do not revile and libel us. They have this character in common — they treat the reader as a friend and brother; they conciliate our sympathies even where they expose our infirmities.

In all things, from the greatest to the least, he who consults the wisdom of conciliation will find his account in it. If he covet power, there is no surer secret first to win and then to secure it; if he desire that respect which is given to dignity of character, he will find that the consideration he bestows on others is an invest-

Digitized by Google

ment which yields the largest return in consideration towards himself. As to the elements of happiness which are found in a temper that seeks peace wherever peace can be made with honour, they are too obvious to need a comment. The union of faith and charity, carried out in thought and in action, pervasive in all the various operations of mind, in all the intricate relations of life, would go far towards the completion of ideal excellence in man. All that is vouchsafed to us of intellectual grandeur, coming to us through literature, through art, through heroism, as well as through religion, from those glimpses of the unproved, and on the earth unprovable, affinity between the human and the divine which necessitate faith — all that is most exquisitely tender in our commerce with each other — all that is wisest in our practical business, while we have human hearts to deal with, suggested to us by that considerate sympathy with human kind which embraces the loving charities of life. Among the Greeks, the Charities were synonymous with the Graces. Admitted into the heathen religion, their task was to bind and unite; their attribute was the zone, without which even love lacked the power to charm. "Without the Graces," sings Pindar, "the gods do not move either in the chorus or the banquet; they are placed near Apollo." Prescribed to us by a gentler creed than the heathen's, they retain their mission as they retain their name. It is but a mock Charity which rejects the zone. Wherever the true and heaven-born harmoniser steals into the midst of discord, it not only appeases and soothes as Charity — it beautifies, commands, and subjugates as Grace.

Digitized by Google

ESSAY XIX.

UPON THE EFFICACY OF PRAISE.

(IN SUPPLEMENT TO THE PRECEDING ESSAY.)

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

UPON THE EFFICACY OF PRAISE.

(IN SUPPLEMENT TO THE PRECEDING ESSAY.)

No one can deny that animals in general, and men in particular, are keenly susceptible to praise. Nor is it a less commonplace truism, that the desire of approbation is at the root of those actions to which the interest of the societies they are held to benefit or adorn has conceded the character of virtue, and sought to stimulate by the promise of renown.

Yet, in our private intercourse with our fellows, there is no instrument of power over their affections or their conduct which we employ with so grudging a parsimony, as that which is the most pleasing and efficacious of all. We are much more inclined to resort to its contrary, and, niggards of praise, are prodigals of censure.

For my own part, I think that, as a word of praise warms the heart towards him who bestows it, and insensibly trains him who receives it to strive after what is praiseworthy, and as our lesser faults may be thus gently corrected by disciplining some counter-merits to stronger and steadier efforts to outgrow them, — so it is, on the whole, not more pleasant than wise to keep any large expenditure of scolding for great occasions, and carry about with us, for the common interchange of social life, the *argent de poche* of ready praise.

Digitized by Google

Scolding begets fear; praise nourishes love; and, not only are human hearts, as a general rule, more easily governed by love than by fear, but fear often leads less to the correction of faults and the struggle for merits, than towards the cunning concealment of the one and the sullen discouragement of the other. But let me be understood. By praise I do not mean flattery: I mean nothing insincere. Insincerity alienates love, and rots away authority. Praise is worth nothing if it be not founded on truth. But as no one within the pale of the laws lives habitually with miscreants in whom there is nothing to praise and everything to censure, — so the persons with whom a man tolerably honest is socially conversant must have some good points, whatever be the number of their bad ones. And it is by appealing to and strengthening whatsoever is good in them, that you may gradually stimulate and train, for the cure of what is evil, that tendency of nature which, in mind as in body, seeks to rid itself of ailments pernicious to its health in proportion as its nobler resources are called forth, and its normal functions are righted by being invigorated.

A certain man of learning and genius with whom I am acquainted, being frustrated in the hope of a distinguished career by a disease which compelled his physician to interdict all severer taskwork of the brain, centred the ambition denied to himself in his only son, whom he educated at home. To him, brilliant and quick, this boy seemed the most stolid of dunces. A friend to whom he complained of the filial stupidity which destroyed his last earthly hope, and embittered the sole occupation which sustained his interest in the world, said to him, "Let the boy stay with me for a

Digitized by Google

week, and at the end of that time I will tell you what can be done with him." The father consented. When the week was over the friend came to him and said, "Courage! your boy has one faculty, in the natural strength of which he excels both you and myself. It is true that he can only learn a very little at a time, and that with a slowness and difficulty which must be tenderly consulted. But the very slowness and difficulty with which he acquires an idea, impresses that idea lastingly on his mind, unless you confuse and efface it by sending another idea to unsettle it before it be fixed. If, when he bring you his exercise of six lines, blurred and bungled, you cry 'Blockhead!' and give him a box on the ear, certainly you give him something to remember which is not in his lesson — you give him a box on the ear! Place before him one idea at a time — associate it with pleasure, not pain; he will keep that one idea firmly, and that one idea will lead on to another. In a word, never scold him for the slowness of his apprehension; praise him cordially for the tenaciousness of his memory. Instead of six lines and blame, give him one line and praise." The father mused. "Now you mention it," said he, "the boy has a good memory, though not in his lessons. He is never at fault in a date if it be not in his 'History;' and never forgets a place if it be not in his Latin grammar."

"And what is more," said the friend, "do you not find that, while he cannot learn by heart any abstract maxims of right and wrong which you extract from the 'Spectator' or 'Blair's Sermons,' he is as honest as if he had digested a whole library of Essays and Sermons? You leave your shillings loose on your

Digitized by Google

table, ready to his hand, if he wish to buy a kite or a trap-bat; but he never takes one, does he?" "Certainly not — it is bad enough that he should be a dunce; Heaven forbid that he should be a thief!"

"Well, then, the boy has acquired for himself an idea of scrupulous honour — even under temptation; that idea came to him insensibly, and without being confused by other ideas of pain — came to him partly through the silent influences of your own living example, of your own careless talk when you are not teaching, and partly from the unconscious sentiment of pride and pleasure in knowing that he is implicitly trusted. Now, do you not think that, with the gifts of a tenacious memory and with a strong sense of the point of honour, you should as little fear that your boy will remain a dunce as that he will become a thief? Lead him upward to learning so gradually, that you do not create the necessities for blame which are stumblingblocks in his way. You create those necessities if you ask him to do what you know he cannot do. Quick and brilliant like yourself you cannot make him, but you can easily make him solid and judicious. Look round the world; for one man who wins high place in it through quickness and brilliancy, — do you not count twenty men who have achieved positions more enviable through solidity and judgment? Now, let me call in your boy; you shall hear him repeat a fable which he has learned by heart in less time than he could learn two lines of the 'Propria quæ maribus,' and you will at once, when you hear him, divine the reason why." The boy is called in. He begins, at first hesitatingly and shyly, to repeat the fable of 'The Hare and the Tortoise.' But scarcely has he got

Digitized by Google

through three lines before the friend cries out, "Capital! well remembered;" the boy's face begins to brighten — his voice gets more animated — the friend shows the liveliest interest in the story, and especially in the success of the tortoise, and at the close exclaims, "Boy, if I had your memory, I would master all that is worth the remembering. Think, as long as you live, of the hare and the tortoise, and — let the hare jeer, the tortoise will win the race."

"I don't flatter him, you see," whispered the friend to the father. "I don't tell him that he is the hare — I tell him frankly that he is the tortoise, and can't afford to lose an inch of the way. (*Aloud*) — And now, my boy, if we are to beat the hare, we must get through the 'Propria quæ maribus,' but we must get through it, like the tortoise, inch by inch: your father will not set you more than one line at a time, and will give you your own time to learn it; and as I know that a more honest honourable boy does not exist, so we trust to you to say when you find that one line is too little — that the pain of learning more is not equal to the pleasure of getting on and catching up the hare; and by the end of a month we shall have you asking to learn a dozen lines. Meanwhile, fasten your whole mind upon one line."

The boy smiled; the father saw the smile, and embraced him. The hint was adopted and acted upon — and though, certainly, the boy never ripened into a wit nor a poet, he took honours at the University, and now promises to become one of the safest and soundest consulting lawyers at the Chancery bar. May his father, who still lives, see his son on the road to the Woolsack!

Digitized by Google

It is true that in great public schools this study of individuals is scarcely possible; the schoolmaster cannot be expected to suit and humour his system so as to fit into each boy's peculiar idiosyncrasy. He has to deal with large masses by uniform discipline and routine. But in large masses the broad elements of human nature are still more conspicuously active than they are in individuals. Sentiments weak or inert in the one breast, are strong and prevalent in numbers. And if it be true that susceptibility to praise is common to human beings, susceptibility to praise will be more vividly the attribute of a multitude than it will be of any individual chosen at random. Therefore, the more the agency of praise is admitted into large schools, the higher the level of aspiration and performance will become. It is noticeable that in any miscellaneous assemblage the moral features in common will have much more parity than the mental. Superior abilities are necessarily rare in a school as in the world, and (so far as display of intellect is concerned) superior abilities alone can attract the preceptor's praise. For he does not, in fact, praise eminent talent who accords an equal praise to mediocrity. But there is some lamentable fault in the whole tuition of the school if there be not a general sentiment among the pupils, favourable to integrity, honour, and truth, shared alike by the dull boys and the clever — that is (to repeat my proposition), parity in the moral, though disparity in the intellectual, attributes. And here, the more the tone of the master sustains that prevailing sentiment of honour by a generous trust in the character of his whole school, the more he will be likely to attain the cardinal end of all wholesale education — viz., the training and develop-

Digitized by Google

ment of honourable and truthful men. For the best kind of praise either to man or boy is that which is implied in a liberal confidence. A head-master under whom one of our public schools rose into rapid celebrity, acted on this theory with the happiest results. There was a compliment encouraging to his whole school in his answer to some boy, who, telling him a story the veracity of which might have been deemed doubtful by a suspicious pedagogue, said, "I hope you believe me, sir?" — "Believe you! of course," replied the teacher; "the greatest of all improbabilities would be that any gentleman in this school would tell me a lie."

Now suppose the story had been a fib, and the teller of it had been punished, I do not believe that the punishment would have had the same good effect on the whole school as the answer which, in placing implicit trust in its honour, must have thrilled through the heart of every one thus brought to remember that, though a boy, he was a gentleman. Nor do I believe that the punishment would have been as permanently operative on the future right conduct of the culprit himself as the pang of remorse and shame which such an answer must have inflicted, unless he were a much meaner creature than it is in the nature of great public schools to produce. If a skilful orator desire to propitiate a hostile assembly, though it be the most unmanageable of all assemblies — an angry mob — he will certainly not begin by scolding and railing against it. Neither, always supposing him to be the master of an art, to excellence in which manly earnestness and courage are always essential, will he attempt to flatter his prejudiced auditors for any wisdom or virtue which

Digitized by Google

they are not exhibiting; if he do so, he will be saluted at once by a cry of "Gammon!" But, after all, they are men, and as such must have much in them which you can praise sincerely — with which you can establish a sympathy, a bond of agreement, if you can but persuade them to hear you. A mob is seldom carried away against you, except by an error of reason misleading into wrong directions an impulsive goodness of heart. It hates you because it has been duped into supposing that you hate the rights of humanity or the cause of freedom. You may frankly acknowledge the goodness of the impulse before you proceed to prove the direction to be wrong. I have seen a mob not indeed converted, but rendered silent, attentive, respectful, by the first few words of a candidate whom they were prepared to hoot and willing to stone, when those first few words have touched their hearts by an evident appreciation of their own commendable love for humanity and freedom.

Even in outlaws and thieves themselves, they who have undertaken the benevolent task of reforming them, bear general testimony in favour of the good effects of praise, and the comparative nullity of scolding. It is told of one of these sagacious philanthropists that, in addressing an assembly of professional appropriators of goods not their own, he said, "It is true you are thieves, but you are also men; and the sentiment of honour is so necessary to all societies of men, that — but you know the proverb, 'Honour among thieves.' It is that sentiment which I appeal to and rely upon when I ask you to abandon your present mode of life, and, by a tenth part of the same cleverness in an honest calling which you manifest in your

Digitized by Google

present calling, acquire from all men the confidence I am about to place in you. Yes, confidence! and confidence what in? — the very thing you have hitherto slighted, honesty. Here is a five-pound note. I want to have change for it. Let any one among you take the note and bring me the change. I rely on his honour." The rogues hesitated, and looked at one another in blank dismay, each, no doubt, in terrible apprehension that the honour of the corps would be disgraced by the perfidy of whatever individual should volunteer an example of honesty. At last one raggamuffin stepped forward, received the note, grinned, and vanished. The orator calmly resumed his discourse upon the pleasures and profits to be found in the exercise of that virtue which distinguishes between *meum* and *tuum*. But he found his audience inattentive, distracted, anxious, restless. Would the raggamuffin return with the change? What eternal disgrace to them all if he did not, and how could they hope that he would? The moments seemed to them hours. At length — at length their human breasts found relief in a lusty cheer. The raggamuffin had reappeared with the change. There was honour even among thieves.

Now it seems to me that, if praise be thus efficacious with rogues, it may be as well to spend a little more of it among honest men. But it is not uncommon to see philanthropists, especially of the softer sex, who so lavish the cream of human kindness on the bad that they have only the skimmed milk left for the good, and even that is generally kept till it is sour.

All men who do something tolerably well, do it better if their energies are cheered on. And if they

Digitized by Google

are doing something for you, your praise brings you back a very good interest. Some men, indeed, can do nothing good without being braced by encouragement — it is true, that is a vanity in them. But we must be very vain ourselves if the vanity of another seriously irritates our own. The humours of men are, after all, subjects more of comedy than of solemn rebuke. And vanity is a very useful humour on the stage of life. It was the habit of Sir Godfrey Kneller to say to his sitter, "Praise me, sir, praise me: how can I throw any animation into your face if you don't choose to animate me?" And laughable as the painter's desire of approbation might be, so bluntly expressed, I have no doubt that the sitter who took the hint got a much better portrait for his pains. Every actor knows how a cold house chills him, and how necessary to the full sustainment of a great part is the thunder of applause. I have heard that when the late Mr. Kean was performing in some city of the United States, he came to the manager at the end of the third act and said, "I can't go on the stage again, sir, if the Pit keeps its hands in its pockets. Such an audience would extinguish Ætna."

And the story saith that the manager made his appearance on the stage, and assured the audience that Mr. Kean, having been accustomed to audiences more demonstrative than was habitual to the severer intelligence of an assembly of American citizens, mistook their silent attention for disapprobation; and, in short, that if they did not applaud as Mr. Kean had been accustomed to be applauded, they could not have the gratification of seeing Mr. Kean act as he had been accustomed to act. Of course the audience — though,

Digitized by Google

no doubt, with an elated sneer at the Britisher's vanity — were too much interested in giving him fair-play to withhold any longer the loud demonstration of their pleasure when he did something to please them. As the fervour of the audience rose, so rose the genius of the actor, and the contagion of their own applause redoubled their enjoyment of the excellence it contributed to create.

Fortunately, all of us do not require loud clapping of hands or waving of white pocket-handkerchiefs. Science and letters have a self-love which would be frightened and shocked at the plaudits which invigorate the spirits of the actor and the orator. Still even science, with all its majesty, has a pain in being scolded, and a pleasure in being praised. The grand Descartes, modestest of men, who wished to live in a town where he should not be known by sight, felt so keen an anguish at the snubbings and censures his writings procured him, that he meditated the abandonment of philosophy and the abjuration of his own injured identity by a change of name. Happily for mankind, some encouraging praises came to his ears, and restored the equilibrium of his self-esteem, — vanity (if all pleasure in approbation is to be so called) reconciling him once more to the pursuit of wisdom.

But it is in the commerce of private life — in our dealings with children, servants, friends, and neighbours — that I would venture the most to recommend some softening and mitigation of that old English candour which consists in eternally telling us our faults, but having too great a horror of compliments ever to say something pleasant as to our merits.

We cannot be always giving instruction, however

Digitized by Google

preceptorial and admonitory our dispositions may be; but if we have given a harmless pleasure, it is not altogether a day lost to the wisest of us. To send a child to his bed happier, with a thanksgiving heartier, he knows not why, to the Author of all blessings, and a livelier fondness in his prayer for his parents; — to cheer the moody veteran, who deems the young have forgotten him, with a few words that show remembrance of what he has done in his generation; to comfort the dispirited struggler for fame or independence, in the moment of fall or failure, with a just commendation of the strength and courage which, if shown in the defeat of to-day, are fair auguries of success on the morrow; — all this may not be so good as a sermon. But it is not every one who has the right or capacity to preach sermons; and any one is authorised and able to do all this. As Seneca so beautifully expresses it — "Utcunque homo est ibi beneficio locus."

And it seems to me that the habit of seeking rather to praise than to blame operates favourably not only on the happiness and the temper, but on the whole moral character of those who form it. It is a great corrective of envy, that most common infirmity of active intellects engaged in competitive strife, and the immediate impulse of which is always towards the disparagement of another; it is also a strong counterbalancing power to that inert cynicism which is apt to creep over men *not* engaged in competition, and which leads them to debase the level of their own humanity in the contempt with which it regards what may be good or great in those who are so engaged. In short, a predisposition to see what is best in others necessarily calls out our own more amiable qualities; and, on the

Digitized by Google

other hand, a predisposition to discover what is bad keeps in activity our meaner and more malignant.

Perhaps, however, to a very ascetic moralist I shall seem to have insisted far too strongly on whatever efficacy may be found in praising, and not painted with impartial colours the virtuous properties of reproof. Certes, a great deal may be said upon that latter and austerer theme. Instances may be quoted of little children who have been flogged out of naughtiness, and great geniuses who have been reviled into surpassing achievements. Whether the good so done has not been generally attended with some evil less traceable, is, I think, a matter of doubt. But that is a question I will not here discuss. Granting all that can be said in vindication of giving pain to another, I still say that it is better and wiser, on the whole, to cultivate the habit of giving pleasure. And I may be excused if I have somewhat exaggerated the value of praise and undervalued the precious benefits of censure, because it needs no homily to dispose us to be sharp enough towards the faults of our neighbours.

On this truth Phædrus has an apologue which may be thus paraphrased —

"From our necks, when life's journey begins,
Two sacks Jove, the Father, suspends;
The one holds our own proper sins,
The other the sins of our friends:

The first, Man immediately throws
Out of sight, out of mind, at his back;
The last is so under his nose,
He sees every grain in the sack."

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

ESSAY XX.

ON SELF-CONTROL.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

ON SELF-CONTROL.

"He who desires to influence others must learn to command himself," is an old aphorism, on which, perhaps, something new may be said. In the ordinary ethics of the nursery, self-control means little more than a check upon temper. A wise restraint, no doubt; but as useful to the dissimulator as to the honest man. I do not necessarily conquer my anger because I do not show that I am angry. Anger vented often hurries towards forgiveness; anger concealed often hardens into revenge.

A hasty temper is not the only horse that runs away with the charioteer on the Road of Life. Nor is it the most dangerous, for it seldom runs away far. It gives a jerk and a shake; but it does not take the bit between its teeth, and gallop blindly on, mile after mile, in one obstinate direction towards a precipice. A hasty temper is an infirmity disagreeable to others, undignified in ourselves — a fault so well known to every man who has it, that he will at once acknowledge it to be a fault which he ought to correct. He requires, therefore, no moralising essayist to prove to him his failing, or teach him his duty. But still a hasty temper is a frank offender, and has seldom that injurious effect either on the welfare of others, or on our own natures, mental and moral, which results from

Digitized by Google

the steady purpose of one of those vices which are never seen in a passion.

In social intercourse, if his character be generous and his heart sound, a man does not often lose a true friend from a quick word. And even in the practical business of life, wherein an imperturbable temper is certainly a priceless advantage, a man of honesty and talent may still make his way without it. Nay, he may inspire a greater trust in his probity and candour, from the heat he displays against trickiness and falsehood. Indeed there have been consummate masters in the wisdom of business who had as little command of temper as if Seneca and Epictetus had never proved the command of temper to be the first business of wisdom. Richelieu strode towards his public objects with a footstep unswervingly firm, though his servants found it the easiest thing in the world to put him into a passion. Sometimes they did so on purpose, pleased to be scolded unjustly, because sure of some handsome amends. And in treating of self-control, I am contented to take that same Richelieu, the Cardinal, as an illustration of the various and expansive meaning which I give to the phrase. Richelieu did not command his temper in the sphere of his private household: he commanded it to perfection in his administration of a kingdom. He was cruel, but from policy, not from rage. Among all the victims of that policy, there was not one whose doom could be ascribed to his personal resentments. The life of no subject, and the success of no scheme, depended on the chance whether the irritable minister was in good or bad humour. If he permitted his temper free vent in his household, it was because there he was only a private individual.

Digitized by Google

There, he could indulge in the luxury of ire without disturbing the mechanism of the state. There, generous as a noble and placable as a priest, he could own himself in the wrong, and beg his servants' forgiveness, without lowering the dignity of the minister, who, when he passed his threshold, could ask no pardon from others, and acknowledge no fault in himself. It was there where his emotions were most held in restraint, — there where, before the world's audience, his mind swept by concealed in the folds of its craft, as, in Victor Hugo's great drama, 'L'Homme Rouge' passes across the stage, curtained round in his litter, a veiled symbol of obscure, inexorable, majestic fate, — it was there where the dread human being seemed to have so mastered his thoughts and his feelings, that they served but as pulleys and wheels to the bloodless machine of his will, — it was there that self-control was in truth the most feeble. And this apparent paradox brings me at once to the purpose for which my essay is written.

What is SELF? What is that many-sided Unity which is centred in the single Ego of a man's being? I do not put the question metaphysically. Heaven forbid! The problem it involves provokes the conjectures of all schools, precisely because it has received no solution from any. The reader is welcome to whatever theory he may prefer to select from metaphysical definitions, provided that he will acknowledge in the word Self the representation of an integral individual human being — the organisation of a certain fabric of flesh and blood, biassed, perhaps, originally by the attributes and peculiarities of the fabric itself — by hereditary predispositions, by nervous idiosyncrasies,

Digitized by Google

by cerebral developments, by slow or quick action of the pulse, by all in which mind takes a shape from the mould of the body; — but still a Self which, in every sane constitution, can be changed or modified from the original bias, by circumstance, by culture, by reflection, by will, by conscience, through means of the unseen inhabitant of the fabric. Not a man has ever achieved a something good or great, but will own that, before he achieved it, his mind succeeded in conquering or changing some predisposition of body.

True self-control, therefore, is the control of that entire and complex unity, the individual Self. It necessitates an accurate perception of all that is suggested by the original bias, and a power to adapt and to regulate, or to oppose and divert, every course to which that bias inclines the thought and impels the action.

For Self, left to itself, only crystallises atoms homogeneous to its original monad. A nature constitutionally proud and pitiless, intuitively seeks, in all the culture it derives from intellectual labour, to find reasons to continue proud and pitiless — to extract from the lessons of knowledge arguments by which to justify its impulse, and rules by which the impulse can be drilled into method and refined into policy.

Among the marvels of psychology, certainly not the least astounding is that facility with which the conscience, being really sincere in its desire of right, accommodates itself to the impulse which urges it to go wrong. It is thus that fanatics, whether in religion or in politics, hug as the virtue of saints and heroes the barbarity of the bigot, the baseness of the assassin. No one can suppose that Calvin did not deem that the

Digitized by Google

angels smiled approbation when he burned Servetus. No one can suppose that when Torquemada devised the Inquisition, he did not conscientiously believe that the greatest happiness of the greatest number could be best secured by selecting a few for a roast. Torquemada could have no personal interest in roasting a heretic; Torquemada did not eat him when roasted; Torquemada was not a cannibal.

Again: no one can suppose that when the German student, Sand, after long forethought, and with cool determination, murdered a writer whose lucubrations shocked his political opinions, he did not walk to the scaffold with a conscience as calm as that of the mildest young lady who ever slaughtered a wasp from her fear of its sting.

So when Armand Richelieu marched inflexibly to his public ends, the spy on his left side, the executioner on his right, Bayard could not have felt himself more free from stain and reproach. His conscience would have found in his intellect not an accusing monitor, but a flattering parasite. It would have whispered in his ear — "Great Man — Hero, nay, rather Demigod* — to destroy is thy duty, because to reconstruct is thy mission. The evils which harass the land — for which Heaven, that gave thee so dauntless a heart and so scheming a brain, has made thee responsible — result from the turbulent ambition of nobles who menace the throne thou art deputed to guard, and the licence of pestilent schisms at war with the Church

* An author dedicated a work to Richelieu. In the dedication, referring to the "Siege of Rochelle," he complimented the Cardinal with the word Hero. When the dedication was submitted to Richelieu for approval, he scratched out "Héros," and substituted "Demi-Dieu!"

Digitized by Google

of which thou art the grace and the bulwark. Pure and indefatigable patriot, undeterred by the faults of the sovereign who hates thee, by the sins of the people who would dip their hands in thy blood, thou toilest on in thy grand work serenely, compelling the elements vainly conflicting against thee into the unity of thine own firm design — unity secular, unity spiritual — one throne safe from rebels, one church free from schisms; in the peace of that unity, the land of thy birth will collect and mature and concentrate its forces, now wasted and waning, till it rise to the rank of the one state of Europe — the brain and the heart of the civilised world! No mythical Hercules thou! Complete thy magnificent labours. Purge the land of the Lion and Hydra — of the throne-shaking Baron — the church-splitting Huguenot!"

Armand Richelieu, by nature not vindictive nor mean, thus motions without remorse to the headsman, listens without shame to the spy, and, when asked on his deathbed if he forgave his enemies, replies, conscientiously ignorant of his many offences against the brotherhood between man and man, "I owe no forgiveness to enemies; I never had any except those of the State."

For human governments, the best statesman is he who carries a keen perception of the common interests of humanity into all his projects, howsoever intellectually subtle. But that policy is not for the interests of humanity which cannot be achieved without the spy and the headsman. And those projects cannot serve humanity which sanction persecution as the instrument of truth, and subject the fate of a community to the accident of a benevolent despot.

Digitized by Google

In Richelieu there was no genuine self-control, because he had made his whole self the puppet of certain fixed and tyrannical ideas. Now, in this the humblest and obscurest individual amongst us is too often but a Richelieu in miniature. Every man has in his own temperament peculiar propellers to the movement of his thoughts and the choice of his actions. Every man has his own favourite ideas rising out of his constitutional bias. At the onset of life this bias is clearly revealed to each. No youth ever leaves college but what he is perfectly aware of the leading motive-properties of his own mind. He knows whether he is disposed by temperament to be timid or rash, proud or meek, covetous of approbation or indifferent to opinion, thrifty or extravagant, stern in his justice or weak in his indulgence. It is while his step is yet on the threshold of life that man can best commence the grand task of self-control; for then he best adjusts that equilibrium of character by which he is saved from the despotism of one ruling passion or the monomania of one cherished train of ideas. Later in life our introvision is sure to be obscured — the intellect has familiarised itself to its own errors, the conscience is deafened to its own first alarms; and the more we cultivate the intellect in its favourite tracks, the more we question the conscience in its own prejudiced creed, so much the more will the intellect find skilful excuses to justify its errors, so much the more will the conscience devise ingenious replies to every doubt we submit to the casuistry of which we have made it the adept.

Nor is it our favourite vices alone that lead us into danger — noble natures are as liable to be led

Digitized by Google

astray by their favourite virtues; for it is the proverbial tendency of a virtue to fuse itself insensibly into its neighbouring vice; and, on the other hand, in noble natures, a constitutional vice is often drilled into a virtue.

But few men can attain that complete subjugation of self to the harmony of moral law, which was the aim of the Stoics. A mind so admirably balanced that each attribute of character has its just weight and no more, is rather a type of ideal perfection, than an example placed before our eyes in the actual commerce of life. I must narrow the scope of my homily, and suggest to the practical a few practical hints for the ready control of their faculties.

It seems to me that a man will best gain command over those intellectual faculties which he knows are his strongest, by cultivating the faculties that somewhat tend to counterbalance them. He in whom imagination is opulent and fervid will regulate and discipline its exercise by forcing himself to occupations or studies that require plain common sense. He who feels that the bias of his judgment or the tendency of his avocations is overmuch towards the positive and anti-poetic forms of life, will best guard against the narrowness of scope and feebleness of grasp which characterise the intellect that seeks common sense only in commonplace, by warming his faculties in the glow of imaginative genius; he should not forget that where heat enters it expands. And, indeed, the rule I thus lay down, eminent men have discovered for themselves. Men of really great imagination will be found to have generally cultivated some branch of knowledge that requires critical or severe reasoning.

Digitized by Google

Men of really great capacities for practical business will generally be found to indulge in a predilection for works of fancy. The favourite reading of poets or fictionists of high order will seldom be poetry or fiction. Poetry or fiction is to them a study, not a relaxation. It is more likely that their favourite reading will be in works called abstruse or dry — antiquities, metaphysics, subtle problems of criticism, or delicate niceties of scholarship. On the other hand, the favourite reading of celebrated lawyers is generally novels. Thus in every mind of large powers there is an unconscious struggle perpetually going on to preserve its equilibrium. The eye soon loses its justness of vision if always directed towards one object at the same distance — the soil soon exhausts its produce if you draw from it but one crop.

But it is not enough to secure counteraction for the mind in all which directs its prevailing faculties towards partial and special results; it is necessary also to acquire the power to keep differing faculties and acquirements apart and distinct on all occasions in which it would be improper to blend them. When the poet enters on the stage of real life as a practical man of business, he must be able to leave his poetry behind him; when the practical man of business enters into the domain of poetry, he must not remind us that he is an authority on the Stock Exchange. In a word, he who has real self-control has all his powers at his command, now to unite and now to separate them.

In public life this is especially requisite. A statesman is seldom profound unless he be somewhat of a scholar; an orator is seldom eloquent unless he have

Digitized by Google

familiarised himself with the world of the poets. But he will never be a statesman of commanding influence, and never an orator of lasting renown, if, in action or advice on the practical affairs of nations, he be more scholar or poet than orator or statesman. Pitt and Fox are memorable instances of the discriminating self-abnegation with which minds of masculine power can abstain from the display of riches unsuited to place and occasion.

In the Mr. Fox of St. Stephen's, the nervous reasoner from premises the broadest and most popular, there is no trace of the Mr. Fox of St. Anne's, the refining verbal critic, with an almost feminine delight in the filigree and trinkets of literature. At rural leisure, under his apple-blossoms, his predilection in scholarship is for its daintiest subtleties; his happiest remarks are on writers very little read. But place the great Tribune on the floor of the House of Commons, and not a vestige of the fine verbal critic is visible. His classical allusions are then taken from passages the most popularly known. And, indeed, it was a saying of Fox's, "That no young member should hazard in Parliament a Latin quotation not found in the Eton Grammar."

Pitt was yet more sparing than Fox in the exhibition of his scholarship, which, if less various than his rival's, was probably quite as deep. And one of the friends who knew him best said, that Pitt rigidly subdued his native faculty of *wit*, not because he did not appreciate and admire its sparkles in orators unrestrained by the responsibilities of office, but because he considered that a man in the position of First Minister impaired influence and authority by the cheers that transferred

Digitized by Google

his reputation from his rank of Minister to his renown as Wit. He was right. Grave situations are not only dignified but strengthened by that gravity of demeanour which is not the hypocrisy of the would-be wise, but the genuine token of the earnest sense of responsibility.

Self-control thus necessitates, first, Self-Knowledge — the consciousness and the calculation of our own resources and our own defects. Every man has his strong point — every man has his weak ones. To know both the strong point and the weak ones is the first object of the man who means to extract from himself the highest degree of usefulness with the least alloy of mischief. His next task is yet more to strengthen his strong points by counterbalancing them with weights thrown into the scale of the weak ones; for force is increased by resistance. Remedy your deficiencies, and your merits will take care of themselves. Every man has in him good and evil. His good is his valiant army, his evil is his corrupt commissariat; reform the commissariat, and the army will do its duty.

The third point in Self-control is Generalship — is Method — is that calm science in the midst of movement and passion which decides where to advance, where to retreat — what regiments shall lead the charge, what regiments shall be held back in reserve. This is the last and the grandest secret: the other two all of us may master.

The man who, but with a mind somewhat above the average (raised above the average whether by constitutional talent or laborious acquirement), has his own intellect, with all its stores, under his absolute control, — that man can pass from one state of idea

Digitized by Google

to another — from action to letters, from letters to action — without taking from one the establishment that would burden the other. It is comparatively a poor proprietor who cannot move from town to country but what he must carry with him all his servants and half his furniture. He who keeps the treasures he has inherited or saved in such compartments that he may know where to look for each at the moment it is wanted, will rarely find himself misplaced in any change of situation. It is not that his genius is versatile, but that it has the opulent attributes which are essential to successful intellect of every kind. The attributes themselves may vary in property and in degree, but the power of the SELF — of the unity which controls all at its disposal — should be in the facility with which it can separate or combine all its attributes at its will.

It is thus, in the natural world, that an ordinary chemist may accomplish marvels beyond the art of magicians of old. Each man of good understanding, who would be as a chemist to the world within himself, will be startled to discover what new agencies spring into action merely by separating the elements dormant when joined, or combining those that were wasted in air when apart. In one completed Man there are the forces of many men. Self-control is self-completion.

Digitized by Google

ESSAY XXI.

THE MODERN MISANTHROPE.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

THE MODERN MISANTHROPE.

"ALL the passions," said an old writer, "are such near neighbours, that if one of them is on fire the others should send for the buckets." Thus love and hate being both passions, the one is never safe from the spark that sets the other ablaze. But contempt is passionless; it does not catch, it quenches fire. The misanthrope who professes to hate mankind has generally passed to that hate from too extravagant a love. And love for mankind is still, though unconsciously to himself, feeding hate by its own unextinguished embers. "The more a man loves his mistress," says Rochefoucauld, "the nearer he is to hate her." Possibly so, if he is jealous; but in return, the more he declares he hates her, the nearer he is to loving her again. Vehement affections do not move in parallels, but in circles. As applied to them the proverb is true, "*Les extrêmes se touchent.*" A man of ardent temperament who is shocked into misanthropy by instances of ingratitude and perfidy, is liable any day to be carried back into philanthropy, should unlooked-for instances of gratitude and truth start up and take him by surprise. But if an egotist, who, inheriting but a small pittance of human affection, concentres it rigidly on himself, should deliberately school his reason into calm contempt for his species, he will retain that contempt to the last.

Digitized by Google

He looks on the world of man, with its virtues and vices, much as you, O my reader, look on an ant-hill! What to you are the virtues or vices of ants? It is this kind of masked misanthropy which we encounter in our day — the misanthropy without a vizard belongs to a ruder age.

The misanthrope of Shakespeare and Molière is a passionate savage; the misanthrope who has just kissed his hand to you is a polished gentleman. No disgust of humanity will ever make *him* fly the world. From his club-window in St. James's his smile falls on all passers-by with equal suavity and equal scorn. It may be said by verbal critics that I employ the word misanthrope incorrectly — that, according to strict interpretation, a misanthrope means not a despiser but a hater of men, and that this elegant gentleman is not, by my own showing, warm-blooded enough for hate. True, but contempt so serene and immovable is the philosophy of hate — the intellectual consummation of misanthropy. My hero would have listened with approving nod to all that Timon or Alceste could have thundered forth in detestation of his kind, and blandly rejoined, "Your truisms, *mon cher*, are as evident as that two and two make four. But you can calculate on the principle that two and two make four without shouting forth, as if you proclaimed a notable discovery, what every one you meet knows as well as yourself. Men are scoundrels — two and two make four — reckon accordingly, and don't lose your temper in keeping your accounts." My misanthrope *à la mode* never rails at vice; he takes it for granted as the elementary principle in the commerce of life. As for virtue, he regards it as a professor of science regards

Digitized by Google

witchcraft. No doubt there are many plausible stories, very creditably attested, that vouch for its existence, but the thing is not in nature. Easier to believe in a cunning imposture than an impossible fact. It is the depth and completeness of his contempt for the world that makes him take the world so pleasantly. He is deemed the man of the world *par excellence*, and the World caresses and admires its Man.

The finest gentleman of my young day, who never said to you an unkind thing nor of you a kind one — whose slightest smile was a seductive fascination — whose loudest tone was a flute-like melody — had the sweetest way possible of insinuating his scorn of the human race. The urbanity of his manners made him a pleasant acquaintance — the extent of his reading an accomplished companion. No one was more versed in those classes of literature in which Mephistopheles might have sought polite authorities in favour of his demoniacal views of philosophy. He was at home in the correspondence between cardinals and debauchees in the time of Leo X. He might have taken high honours in an examination on the memoirs illustrating the life of French *salons* in the *ancien régime*. He knew the age of Louis Quinze so well that to hear him you might suppose he was just fresh from a *petit souper* in the *Parc aux Cerfs*.

Too universally agreeable not to amuse those present at the expense of those absent, still, even in sarcasm, he never seemed to be ill-natured. As one of his associates had a louder reputation for wit than his own, so it was his modest habit to father upon that professed *diseur de bons mots* any more pointed epigram that occurred spontaneously to himself. "I wonder," said

Digitized by Google

a dandy of another dandy who was no Adonis, "why on earth — has suddenly taken to cultivate those monstrous red whiskers." "Ah," quoth my pleasant fine gentleman, "I think for my part they become his style of face very much; A — says 'that they plant out his ugliness.'" For the rest, in all graver matters, if the man he last dined with committed some act which all honest men blamed, my misanthrope evinced his gentle surprise, not at the act, but the blame — "What did you expect?" he would say, with an adorable indulgence, "he was a man — *like yourselves!*"

Sprung from one of the noblest lineages in Christendom — possessed of a fortune which he would smilingly say "was not large enough to allow him to give a shilling to any one else," but which, prudently spent on himself, amply sufficed for all the elegant wants of a man so emphatically single — this darling of fashion had every motive conceivable to an ordinary understanding not to be himself that utter rogue which he assumed every other fellow-creature to be. Nevertheless, he was too nobly consistent to his creed to suffer his example to be at variance with his doctrine; and here he had an indisputable advantage over Timon and Alceste, who had no right, when calling all men rogues, to belie their assertion by declining to be rogues themselves. His favourite amusement was whist, and in that game his skill was so consummate that he had only to play fairly in order to add to his income a sum which, already spending on himself all that he himself required, he would not have known what to do with. But, as he held all men to be cheats, he cheated on principle. It was due to the honour of his philo-

Digitized by Google

sophy to show his utter disdain of the honour which impostors preached, but which only dupes had the folly to practise. If others did not mark the aces and shuffle up the kings as he did, it was either because they were too stupid to learn how, or too cowardly to risk the chance of exposure. He was not as stupid, he was not as cowardly, as the generality of men. It became him to show his knowledge of their stupidity and his disdain of their cowardice. *Bref* — he cheated! — long with impunity: but, as Charron says, *L'homme se pique* — man cogs the dice for his own ruin. At last he was suspected, he was watched, he was detected. But the first thought of his fascinated victims was not to denounce, but to warn him — kindly letters conveying delicate hints were confidentially sent to him: he was not asked to disgorge, not exhorted to repent; let bygones be bygones; only for the future, would he, in playing with his intimate associates, good-naturedly refrain from marking the aces and shuffling up the kings?

I can well imagine the lofty smile with which the scorner of men must have read such frivolous recommendations to depart from the philosophical system adorned in vain by his genius if not enforced by his example. He who despised the opinions of sages and saints — he to be frightened into respecting the opinions of idlers at a club! — send to him an admonition from the world of honour, to respect the superstitions of card-players! as well send to Mr. Faraday an admonition from the world of spirits to respect the superstitions of table-rappers! To either philosopher there would be the same reply — "I go by the laws of nature." In short, strong in the conscience

Digitized by Google

of his opinion, this consistent reasoner sublimely persevered in justifying his theories of misanthropy by his own resolute practice of knavery, inexcusable and unredeemed.

"What Timon thought, this god-like Cato was!"

But man, whatever his inferiority to the angels, is still not altogether a sheep. And even a sheep only submits to be sheared once a-year; to be sheared every day would irritate the mildest of lambs. Some of the fellow-mortals whom my hero caressed and plundered, took heart, and openly accused him of marking the aces and shuffling up the kings. At first his native genius suggested to him the wisdom of maintaining, in smiling silence, the contempt of opinion he had hitherto so superbly evinced. Unhappily for himself, he was induced by those who, persuaded that a man of so high a birth could never have stooped to so low a peccadillo, flattered him with the assurance of an easy triumph over his aspersers — unhappily, I say, he was induced into a departure from that system of action which he had hitherto maintained with so supreme a success. He condescended, for the first time in his life, to take other men into respect — to regard what might be thought of him by a world he despised. He brought an action for libel against his accusers. His counsel, doubtless by instruction, sought to redeem that solitary inconsistency in his client by insinuating that my lord's chosen associates were themselves the cheats, malignant conspirators against the affable hawk of quality in whom they had expected to find a facile pigeon.

Digitized by Google

The cuttle-fish blackens the water to escape from his enemies, but he does not always escape; nay, in blackening the water he betrays himself to the watchful spectators. My hero failed in his action, and quitted the court leaving behind him the bubble reputation. If I am rightly informed, Adversity, that touchstone of lofty minds, found this grand philosopher as serene as if he had spent his life in studying Epictetus. He wrapt himself, if not in virtue, at least in his scorn of it, —

"Et udo
Spernit humi defugiente penno."

He retired to the classic Tusculum of his villa in St. John's Wood. There, cheered by the faithful adherence of some elegant companions, who, if they did not believe him innocent, found him unalterably agreeable, he sipped his claret and moralised on his creed. Doubtless he believed that "the talk would soon subside," "the thing blow over." The world would miss him too much not to rally again round the sage who so justly despised it. Perhaps his belief might have been realised, but,

"Vita summa brevis spem nos vetat inchoare longam" —

Death, the only player that no man can cheat, cut into his table, and trumped the last card of his long suit.

In the more brilliant period of this amiable man-scorner's social career, once, and once only, he is said to have given way to anger. One of his associates (I say designedly associates, not friends, out of respect for his memory, since friendship is a virtue, and he therefore denied its existence) — one of his associates wrote a comedy. The comedy was acted. My hero

Digitized by Google

honoured the performance by appearing in the author's box. Leaning forward so as to be seen of all men, he joined his hands in well-bred applause of every abortive joke and grammatical solecism, till, in a critical part of the play, there occurred a popular claptrap — a something said in praise of virtue and condemnation of vice. The gallery of course responded to the claptrap, expressing noisy satisfaction at the only sentiment familiar to their comprehension which they had hitherto heard. But my archetype of modern misanthropy paused aghast, suspended

"The soft collision of applauding gloves,"

and, looking at his associate as reproachfully as Cæsar might have looked at Brutus when he sighed forth "*Et tu, Brute!*" let fall these withering words, "Why, Billy, this is betraying the Good Old Cause." So saying, he left the box, resentful. Now, this man I call the genuine, positive, realistic Misanthrope, compared to whom Timon and Alceste are poetical make-believes!

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

Digitized by Google

PRINTING OFFICE OF THE PUBLISHER.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

CAXTONIANA:

A SERIES OF ESSAYS

ON

LIFE, LITERATURE, AND MANNERS.

BY

SIR E. BULWER LYTTON, BART.

AUTHOR OF "THE CAXTONS," ETC.

COPYRIGHT EDITION.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LEIPZIG

BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1864.

The Right of Translation is reserved.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

CONTENTS

OF VOLUME II.

		Page
ESSAY XXII.	Motive Power	1
— XXIII.	On certain Principles of Art in Works of Imagination	119
— XXIV.	Posthumous Reputation	157
— XXV.	On some Authors in whose Writings Knowledge of the World is eminently displayed	195
— XXVI.	Readers and Writers	295
— XXVII.	On the Spirit of Conservatism	301
L'ENVOI .	. . . . .	320

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

ESSAY XXII.

MOTIVE POWER.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

MOTIVE POWER.

A LITTLE while ago, as I was walking down Parliament Street, I suddenly found myself face to face with a man who, in the days of my early youth, had inspired me with a warm regard and a lively admiration. Though he was some years older than myself, we had been for a short time very intimate; but after we had once separated, I saw no more of him till thus, towards the evening of life, we two, who had parted company in its morn, recognised each other at the first glance; and, after exclaiming, "Is it you?" halted mute, like men to whom startling news is abruptly told. The past, as when we last separated, the present as we now met, brought before us in the extreme of contrast; the long, gradual, stealthy interval between the dates annulled; so that, in uttering those words, "Is it you?" each saw himself as he was in youth, and simultaneously felt the change time had wrought in his own life by reading the work of time in the face of the other. But such reflection was, as it were, the flash of the moment, and with the next moment it passed away. As I was then hurrying down to the House of Commons, somewhat fearful lest I should not be in time to vote on a question worn so threadbare that it was not likely the patience of members would allow it to be long rediscussed, my old acquaint-

Digitized by Google

ance kindly turned back from his own way to accommodate himself to mine; and, when we parted at the doors of Westminster Hall, much to my surprise he had invited me to visit him in the country, and, perhaps still more to his surprise, I had accepted the invitation.

Sir Percival Tracey (so let me call the person I have just introduced to the reader) was one of those men to whom Nature gives letters of recommendation to Posterity, which, from some chance or another, never reach their destination.

It has been said by a man of a genius and a renown so great as to render his saying the more remarkable, that if we could become thoroughly acquainted with the biography of any one who has achieved fame, we should find that he had met with some person to fame unknown, whose intellect had impressed him more than that of any of the celebrated competitors with whom it had been his lot to strive. He whom I call Percival Tracey might serve to illustrate whatever truth may be found in that bold assertion. At the time of life in which I had been among his familiar associates, I can remember no one of the same years who has since become distinguished, so strongly impressing the men who were distinguished then with respect for his superior capacities, and a faith in his ultimate renown. Yet, if I disclose his real name, in him this later generation would only recognise one of those wealthy and well-born gentlemen of whom little or nothing is known to the public, except that they are — well-born and wealthy.

Deprived of both parents in early childhood, Percival Tracey was left to the guardianship of his maternal

Digitized by Google

uncle, the Duke of ——. Sent to a public school, illustrious less for learned boys than famous men, he there acquired one of those brilliant reputations which light up the after-paths of ambition; for it is a wondrous advantage to candidates for power and renown to enter on the arena of life with the *esprit de corps* of coevals already enlisted in their favour; an advantage so great, that I venture to doubt whether any system of wholly private education, however theoretically admirable, can compensate to an able and ambitious man, whom such education had formed, for the loneliness in which, at the onset of his career, he stands among his own generation — no young hands thrilling to applaud, no young voices whispering "he was one of US!" all disposed to cavil at the claims of a stranger whose talents revive no recollections of early promise — whose successes recall no sympathies of boyish friendship — whose honours, if his labours win them, will add no name to the *Libro d'oro* of the never-forgotten School!

Cambridge was the university selected for the completion of Tracey's academical studies, whether from family associations or by his own desire. On leaving school, somewhere about the age of sixteen, he was accordingly placed in the house of a tutor, who had acquired the highest mathematical honours which the University of Cambridge can confer. There he contracted a taste, and developed an aptitude, for the Positive Sciences, which might have enabled him to confirm at college the reputation he had gained at school. But just as he was about to commence his first term at Trinity, he was attacked by a fever, in reality caused by a rash feat in swimming, but which his guardian insisted on imputing to an over-fatigue in study. The

Digitized by Google

Duke of —— was in his own way an exceedingly clever man — a man of the world — into which world he had entered as an aspiring cadet, before, by the death of his elder brother, he had become a contented duke. His Grace was no Goth; he held book-learning in the greatest possible respect. But while he allowed that book-learning lifted up into station the poor and the humbly born, he had a vague notion that book-learning tends to divert from their proper sphere of action the wealthy and the highborn: and in Percival Tracey he hoped to find the zealous champion, and perhaps ultimately the redoubted chief, of that party for which his Grace felt a patriot's preference. Hailing, therefore, in Percival's unlucky fever, an excuse for distracting him from unhealthful studies, the Duke, instead of immuring his brilliant ward in the cloisters of a college, sent him forth to perform what was anciently called "The Grand Tour," and in polite acquaintance with courts and capitals, learn by how little knowledge mankind are governed. At the end of three years Percival Tracey returned to England, and entered London society as a young man in possession of vast estates entirely at his own disposal, and with the command of a considerable capital accumulated by the savings of a long minority. He was the representative of a family which, in point of antiquity, of illustrious connections, and the political influence derived from territorial possessions, might vie with the noblest in England. The advantages he took from Nature were as brilliant as those he had received from Fortune. His frame, at once light and vigorous, was the faithful index of a constitution capable of enduring any of those fatigues, more exhausting than

Digitized by Google

bodily labour, by which study or ambition tasks the resources of life. He was sufficiently good-looking to be generally considered handsome; but not so outrageously good-looking as to acquire that kind of reputation for beauty which elevates the rank of a woman, but disparages that of a man. For I presume that any woman, however sensible, would be rather admired for her outward attractions than her intellectual powers; and I am sure that no sensible man, who possesses that pride which Milton calls "an honest haughtiness," would not feel very much ashamed of such a reputation. In fact, if Percival Tracey was handsome, it was not from mere regularity of feature, nor lustre of colouring, but from an expression of countenance which seemed to take sweetness from the amenities of his heart, and nobleness from the dignity of his mind. In his prodigal culture, graceful accomplishments felicitously combined with severer studies; so that the one seemed as naturally to grow up amidst the other as the corn-flowers grow amidst the corn. He excelled in all the bodily sports and exercises which young Englishmen of his rank esteem as manly, to a degree which won their pardon for his display of those elegant ornaments of character which they are apt to neglect as effeminate. Endowed with a vivid sense of beauty, and an exquisite felicity of taste, he was more than an amateur of the Fine Arts, more than a connoisseur; he was an artist. Professional painters discovered amazing beauties in his paintings — had he himself been a professional painter, they would doubtless have paid him the higher compliment of discovering amazing faults. He was an excellent linguist; and wrote or spoke most of the polite languages in Europe with the

Digitized by Google

correctness and fluency of an educated native. Yet with all this surface of graceful accomplishment no one ever called him superficial. On the contrary, it was the habit of his mind to search into the depth of things. Hence his confirmed attachment to the Positive Sciences; and I believe, indeed, the only MSS. he was ever induced to publish (and those anonymously) were some papers in a scientific journal, which were held, at the time, to throw much light upon a very abstruse subject, and spoken of highly by professed philosophers. But his authorship was undetected, and the papers themselves, in the rapid progress of scientific discovery, have no doubt been long since forgotten. Hence, too, the tendency of his faculties was not towards the creative, but towards the critical directions of intellect. He had sufficient warmth of imagination to appreciate the works on which imagination bestows a life more lasting than the real, yet that appreciation did not lead him to imitate, but rather to analyse, what he admired. Fond of metaphysics, he prized most that kind of poetry in which metaphysical speculation lights up unsuspected beauties, or from which it derives familiar illustrations of recondite truths. Thus in his talk, though it had the easy charm of a man of the world, there was a certain subtlety, sometimes a certain depth, of reasoning, which, supported by large stores of comprehensive information, imposed upon his listeners, and brought into bolder relief the vantage-ground for political station which his talents and his knowledge took from the dignity of his birth and the opulence of his fortune. In short, at the date I now refer to, the practised observers of the time, and the acknowledged authorities in opinion, glancing over the foremost figures in the

Digitized by Google

young generation, pointed to Percival Tracey and said, "See the Coming Man!"

Secretly, as I learned more intimately, and yet more admiringly, to know the object of a prediction which all appearances might justify — I doubted whether the prediction would be realised. The main reason of my doubt was this: because even then, in the prime of his dazzling youth, Percival Tracey lacked that enthusiasm without which even a great intellect is seldom impelled into the doing of great things.

Perhaps from one of the very excellencies of his mental organisation he was indifferent to ambition, and not covetous of fame. All that culture which he had so liberally bestowed on the natural fertility of his mind, was rather in compliance with his own tastes than for any definite object in connection with what the world could give or what the world might say. He had little of that vanity which makes men restless — much of that self-esteem which tends to keep men still. Partly from the speculative bias to which his fondness for philosophical studies inclined his thoughts — partly from the *vis inertiæ* which is the property of bodies so solidly fixed on this earth as are great wealth and great station — he said "*Cui bono*" to any effort that imposed a violence on tastes and dispositions, which, in themselves serene and peaceful, were shocked by strife, as the ears of a master in music are shocked by discord.

He had abundant energy and perseverance in the accumulation of his mental stores, simply because he was thus rendered more complete and more happy in himself; and he was averse to all gladiatorial vying and contest with others, inasmuch as the passions

Digitized by Google

engendered by ambition serve rather to render the intellectual being less harmoniously completed, and the moral being less felicitously calm. His mind thus resembled one of those fountains which feed themselves through invisible conduits from an elevated source, but overflow into no running streams; — ever fresh and ever full, they soar, but they do not spread. Yet, at the time I speak of, Percival Tracey had a vague consciousness that he ought to do something — some day or other. But as that consciousness disquieted his enjoyment of the present, he never nourished it by meditation. Day after day he put off the doing of the destined something to that morrow which is the vanishing point in so many of our fancy landscapes. One day he took it into his head to set out on a tour in the East, a region of the globe which he had not hitherto visited. The eve before his departure he said to me, "When I come back, I suppose I must make up my mind to enter Parliament — why do you smile?"

"Because you know there will shortly be a vacancy for the county which your forefathers represented for centuries, and you are going to the East in order to get out of the way of requisitions and deputations from the North."

"Well, I own that the House of Commons does not attract me at present; as no doubt it will by-and-by. Infancy has its whooping-cough — middle age its politics."

"If politics be a disease, I don't think you are likely to catch it. It is a complaint which shows itself early, and the Englishman who has no twinge of it in

Digitized by Google

youth has not that sort of constitution on which it ever takes hold in middle life."

"Hem," answered Tracey, "perhaps you are right there: — Metaphor apart, I do not fancy that I could ever take much interest in politics, unless the country were actually in that danger which one-half the country always say that it is, when the leaders of the other half govern it. But still I ought to do something; — speech-making and voting are not the only occupations of life — what do you think I could best do?"

"The best thing you could do at present is to leave off saying '*Cui bono*' when anything whatever is to be done."

Tracey laughed gaily — we shook hands and parted, nor met again till the Percival Tracey whom I had last seen at the age of thirty was close upon his sixtieth year.

As I had been unable to fix the precise day for my visit, so it had been left to my option to come without previous notice any day in the following week which my avocations and engagements would permit. It was a bright summer afternoon in which I found myself free, with two or three days before me equally at my command, should I wish so far to prolong my visit. After a journey by the railway of some hours, I arrived at the small station which Tracey had told me was the nearest one to his house — and I heard to my surprise that I was then six miles distant from his park gates. "How is it," I asked the station-master, "that your Company do not accommodate so large a proprietor as Sir Percival Tracey with a station nearer to his residence?"

"Sir," answered the official, "it is not the fault of

Digitized by Google

the Company; — when they asked his consent to the line, which passes for several miles through his estate — in the plan submitted to his inspection, a station was marked close to his gates. He made it a peremptory condition that there should be no such station — no station nearer to him than this one."

"I should think he must have repented that whim by this time," said I.

"No," answered the station-master, smiling. "It was only the other day that the Company again offered Sir Percival the station he had before declined, and again he refused it."

I inquired no farther, entered the chaise which was waiting for me, and, traversing a country singularly beautiful, but singularly primitive, with large wastes of heath land and common, backed sometimes by many-coloured hills clothed with wandering sheep, sometimes by masses of hanging wood, intersected by devious rivulets breaking into rocky falls, I arrived at last at my friend's lodge. The opening into the glades of the park so caught my eye that I descended from the chaise, and, ordering my servant to go on before and announce my visit, I walked leisurely along the sward, under the boughs of trees that might have sheltered the ringdove from the falcons of Saxon earls. The heat of the day had declined; the western sun was tempered by the shades of the forest hills, amidst which it was slowly sinking. It had been my first escape into the country that summer; and the change from the throng and reek of London was in itself delight. Perhaps on such holiday occasions there is more pure and unalloyed enjoyment of nature when it is wholly dissociated from the sense of property — when

Digitized by Google

we do not say to ourselves, "This is my land, these my groves, these my flocks and herds." For with the sense of property come involuntarily the cares of property. And in treading his own turfs the observer looks round to see what has been neglected or what has been improved in his absence; he casts not a poet's but a farmer's eye on the ewe nestled under the oak tree. "Heavens! Has it got the fly?" and the kine that pause from grazing, "Why! Have they got the mouth-complaint?" But that is not all. Even when one is undisturbed by the master's cares, the pleasure of gazing, after absence, on what is one's own, what one remembers in childhood, in youth, what is associated with events of hope and fear, sorrow or joy in one's own past life, is not that absolute sympathy and fusion with outward objective nature herself, into which she quietly steals us when we have no personal history connected with the scenes we behold. For where our own individual existence obtrudes itself upon our contemplation, the Genius of the Place is no longer the joyous Universal Pan, but rather the pensive ghost of our former selves: and Nature, instead of gently subjugating our own mind, and weaning us from the consciousness of our own careworn life, separate and apart from herself and her myriads, rather wakes up reflections which subject her to their dominating intellectual influences, and deepen the sense of our own fate and place in her world.

Somewhat suddenly, the features of the park changed; the wilder beauties of woodland, with many a dell and hillock, and sweeps of profitless fern and gorse, gave way to a broad lawn, separated from the park by a slight fence; and the house of the owner rose before

Digitized by Google

me. My first impression at its sight was that of surprised disappointment. I had, not unnaturally, presumed that I should see an ancient stately pile in keeping with the long descent and vast possessions of its lord. But the house before me seemed small for the character of the ground immediately round it, and was evidently modern. As I drew nearer to it, however, the first impression of disappointment wore off. And for that kind of architecture which suits best with what we call a villa, I have seldom seen any structure more pleasing to the eye from justness of proportion and elegance of appropriate enrichments. The columns of its lofty portico were of the *rosso antico* marble, and the sky-line of the roof was playfully relieved by statues and vases of exquisite workmanship. Still the house was certainly small for the habitual residence of an owner so wealthy. It could not have accommodated the guests, nor found room for the establishment, of a man disposed to be hospitable on the scale of sixty thousand a-year; it would have been a small house for a social squire of five thousand. When I was about a hundred yards from the stone balustrade in front of the building, one of the windows on the ground-floor was thrown open, and my host sprang out with the bound of a boy. He still, indeed, preserved the lightness of frame which had rendered him in youth so peerless in all active sports. And as he came towards me, I muttered to myself the lines which I remembered to have applied to him more than thirty years before —

> "'Tis he; I ken the manner of his gait;
> He rises on the toe — that spirit of his
> In aspiration lifts him from the earth."

Digitized by Google

After we had shaken hands and exchanged the customary salutations, Tracey said to me, "Shall we look into the garden? It wants a good hour yet to our dinner-time, for to-day we do not dine till eight. I had a presentiment that you would come to-day."

"Eight o'clock is not then your usual hour? I am afraid I have put you out of your ways."

"Reassure yourself; we have no usual hour for dinner so long as the summer lasts. Yesterday we dined at three on the banks of the lake which I hope to show you; the day before, we resolved to enjoy a moonlight sail on the sea, which is eighteen miles off, and did not dine till ten. . . . . We live a strange forester kind of life here, and have no habits which do not vary with a whim or the weather."

By this time he had led me to the garden-side of the house, which was not seen from the road, and at this side the building was of a much gayer and more fanciful character than that of the entrance front. It was enriched yet more profusely with urns and statues; with the lively additions of gilded balconies filled with flowers, and admitted of reliefs in colour, which, though not uncommon in Italy, I had never before seen introduced into the façades of our English homes. But what chiefly pleased me was a very long colonnade, terminating in a lofty Belvidere tower, which extended from the body of the house. Seeing that this colonnade was glazed between the pillars, and catching sight of some plants within, I supposed at first that it was a conservatory; but Tracey told me that it was never heated to a degree beyond the temperature maintained in the sitting-rooms, and contained only those plants

Digitized by Google

which could thrive in an atmosphere not insalubrious to English lungs. "It serves," said he, "as a lounge in winter or wet weather, and answers the purpose of the peristyles or porticos attached to the old Roman villas. It also holds my aviaries, and constitutes my statue gallery, as well as a museum for such classical antiquities as I have collected in my travels. In short, I endeavour to store within it whatever may suggest pleasant thoughts when one wanders there alone, or agreeable subjects for conversation when one is there with companions. You will find its walls inscribed with quotations from favourite authors in all languages. Perhaps this will strike you at first as pedantry or affectation. But when you have made acquaintance with the place, I am sure that you will recognise the charm of being greeted by beautiful thougths every time you pause, tired with your own thoughts, or willing to lead some languid or over-disputatious talker into trains of idea, for ever fresh yet for ever soothing."

Turning from the house, my eye now rested on a garden, which seemed to me a perfect model of art, whether from the harmony with which colours were assorted in the parterres, or the delicacy of proportion observed in the numerous sculptured ornaments which decorated the terraces — the whole taking life and movement from the play of many fountains; and the confines of the artistic scenery fusing themselves in the natural landscape beyond, as the green alleys, stretching from the last of the gradual terraces, lost themselves in the depth and mystery of the closing woods. Just then a ringdove was winging its flight along one of these vistas, and simultaneously to both

Digitized by Google

our lips came the quotation from Keats's wondrous 'Ode to the Nightingale' —

"To leave the world unseen,
And with thee fade away into the forest dim!"

A poet's verse remembered and repeated by two companions in a breath, why or wherefore they can scarcely explain, is a link in sympathy which brings them both insensibly nearer together. Hitherto we had walked somewhat apart; the next moment we were arm-in-arm. There was, however, a pause in our conversation till we found ourselves seated near one of the fountains. Then, rousing myself from my reverie, I asked my host if he had built the house and planned the gardens.

"Yes," he said, with a smile; "whatever we owe to our ancestors, one likes best what one has done one's self. The fact is, however, that when, many years ago, I resolved to settle in England, but to renounce London, I found that, with three family seats, I had not one home in which I could live according to my tastes. Tracey Court, in the north of England, has been the usual residence of our family for several generations: it is an enormous pile, which necessitates an immense establishment. Now I have a special dislike to live begirt with dependants for whom I have no use, and to incur constraints for which there is no object. At Tracey Court, which is the centre of my principal estates in England, my predecessors had always maintained as much formal state, and indulged in as much wearisome ostentation, as if they had had the misfortune to be born German princes instead of English country gentlemen. There, they kept up what they called the political influence of the family. I could

Digitized by Google

not have lived at Tracey Court, but what I must either have perpetually put myself out of my way for things in which I had no interest, and for persons with whom I had no sympathy, or I should have been the object of universal dislike; and I am not so stoical a philosopher as to be callous to unkind glances and indignant whispers every time I cross my threshold. Besides, Tracey Court, though grand in its way, is gloomy, the scenery rude, the climate harsh: I love to surround myself with cheerful images. In Ireland I have a large rude old castle in the midst of a county in which it rains nine months in the year. Universal hospitality, too, is still more the curse of Irish castles than of English manor-houses. I might have shut my windows against the rains, but not my doors against the neighbourhood, to say nothing of invading tourists. I had visited the castle in my youth — I had no desire to visit it again;" here, I observed that my friend sighed, and then, as with an effort, went on more rapidly. "Thirdly, I have what is considered the jointure-house for widowed Traceys — a pretty place enough, not too large, on the banks of the Thames. There I first took up my abode. But it is only twelve miles from town — a railway station close to its garden-wall. So near London, the fidget of London travelled in the atmosphere with the smoke, and irritated my nerves. I wished to forget London, and London at twelve miles' distance would not be forgotten. Then I bethought me of this place, which was the earliest possession of my family, but at which for more than two centuries they had never resided — for a very good reason, there was on it no residence; the manor-house had been burned down in the troubled

Digitized by Google

reign of Charles I. Here there were no hereditary duties of hospitality — no troubles of political influence — small comparative cares of property; for in this county I am not one of the wealthiest proprietors — the rental I derive from my lands here does not exceed £6000 a-year. But the acreage is happily very large in proportion to the rental, so that I have no near neighbours. The farmers are old-fashioned primitive agriculturists, and allow their hedges to grow six yards high and spread four yards thick, all lush with convolvulus and honeysuckle. Here you can ride through the green lanes which make the beauty of England and the reproach of husbandry. The climate is enjoyable — its springs and autumns delicious, its winters mild, its summers only too hot for those who do not take exercise. In a word, the air and the scenery pleased me. I built a house here according to my own fancy — not one that would please a formal architect — not purely Greek, Roman, Italian, but such as seemed to me to blend the general characteristics of the bright classic life with the necessities of English climate and the comforts of modern usage. I resolved beforehand that I would construct a residence on a scale proportioned to the rental of the estate on which it was built — in short, that I would here escape from the toils and troubles which embitter the expenditure of £60,000 a-year, and, so far as my personal income is concerned, live somewhat within the £6000 a-year which I possess in this county. If I lived alone, and if my tastes as artist did not corrupt my theories as philosopher, I should contract my expenditure into much narrower limits. But I have an aunt — a sister of my mother — who was born in a

Digitized by Google

second wedlock, and is very little older than myself. When I came back to England I found her a lone widow, and as she had given up all jointure and settlement for the purpose of paying her husband's debts, her natural home was with me. She had been accustomed to a certain mode of living; I could not ask her to submit to privations. For this reason, and for other reasons more personal, I have fixed my expenditure at the highest rate which, to my mind, is compatible with ease; for in all walks of life there is quite as little ease in an over-large shoe as there is in a tight one."

"I congratulate you, my dear Tracey," said I, somewhat sarcastically, "on having assessed your expenditure at a sum which does not necessitate very rigorous privations. Six thousand a-year, which you speak of so modestly as a kind of genteel poverty, is, I suspect, when net and clear, as in your case, somewhat above the average income enjoyed by peers under the rank of earl. I agree with you that a gentleman who does not care for ostentation may contrive, by the aid of philosophy, to live very comfortably on £6000 a-year. But still you have the remaining £54,000 yearly on your hands; and I presume that you do not get rid of that burden by hoarding it in the Three per cents."

"Nay," answered Tracey, slightly colouring, "if hoarding be a pleasure, I think it is a sinful one; and sins are like thistles — despite the best husbandry, they will spring up; but it is only in the worst husbandry that one does not try to get rid of them. The surplus of my income is spent somehow — I hope usefully. I endeavour to know as little as I can the

Digitized by Google

precise details in which it disappears. But, hark! there rings the half-hour bell."

"Do you live here, with no other companion but your aunt?" I asked, as we walked back towards the house.

"Oh, no; that would be loneliness twice over. We have always a few friends staying with us. I have so arranged my house, that, thank heaven, it cannot hold many acquaintances. But let me tell you whom you will meet here. First, as to my aunt, Lady Gertrude, her you have met before, but many years ago: I will leave you to discover for yourself those changes which Time makes in us all. Secondly, you will find, in a gentleman named Caleb Danvers, who condescends to act as my librarian and secretary, a prodigy of learning and memory, with a touch of quaint humour. Thirdly, I shall introduce to you, in Patrick Bourke, a young Irish artist, full of promise and enthusiasm. Some young artist or other is always in the house. I like the society of artists; and, from pure selfishness, I secure to myself that luxury by a pretence of liberality. Every year I select some young painter or sculptor, and, after a short probation in this retreat, I send him to Italy to finish his studies. Fourthly and fifthly, you will make acquaintance with a young couple, Henry and Clara Thornhill. They have not been long married, and are still in love with each other; but he, ungrateful man! is not in love only with her as she is with him — he is in love also with his profession, which is the army. He is at present nothing more than a captain in the line, but is in daily hopes that Europe will be desolated by some horrible war, which may result in his becoming a

Digitized by Google

field-marshal. For the rest, a fine young fellow, a relation of mine — a relation near enough to count on being one of my heirs. But he is, at present, less bent upon killing me than some half a million or so of unsuspecting foreigners.".

By this time we were within the house. My host conducted me to the rooms which he devoted to my use, and which, though small, constituted the ideal of a bachelor's apartment — the bedroom opening, on one hand, to a bath-room; on the other to a pretty study, the writing-table placed at the window. Did Tracey remember my love to be near the light whenever I read or scribble? — probably enough; for he had a happy memory where he could give pleasure. The walls of the room were made companionable by dwarf bookcases, which, as I afterwards discovered, were enriched with those volumes one is always glad to reperuse. When Tracey left me, I sat for some minutes musing. Was this man, for whom such high destinies in fame had been predicted, wholly without regret for the opportunities he had thrown away? In the elegant epicurean life which he had planned, and seemed to carry out for himself, should I not detect some disguised disappointment? And if not, had a being who, whatever his faults, had been in youth singularly generous and noble-hearted, really degenerated into a bloodless egotist, shunning all the duties which could distract him from the holiday into which he sought to philosophise away existence?

I could not satisfactorily unravel the problem which my conjectures invented, and addressed to my fancy; and I went down-stairs just as the dinner-bell rang, resolved to gather, from the talk of my fellow-

Digitized by Google

guests, some hints that might enlighten my comprehension of the character of the host.

On entering the drawing-room, I found there already assembled all whom I had been prepared to meet. I had scarcely renewed a very slight and ancient acquaintance with Lady Gertrude before dinner was announced. She took my arm, and we were soon seated side by side at a round table in the prettiest dining-room I ever saw. The shape of the room was octagon, with a domed ceiling, beautifully painted in the arabesques and festoons which gave so fanciful a decoration to the old Roman villas. On the walls were repeated the same imageries as we see in Pompeian houses, but in tints more subdued, and more suited to the taste in colour which we take from our colder climate, than the glaring contrasts in which Pompeian artists indulged. The arabesques formed panels for charming pictures, the subjects of which I soon perceived to be taken from the more convivial of Horace's odes. In these paintings there was a certain delicacy of sentiment, conjoined with an accuracy of costume and a fidelity of scene and manners, in which I recognised at once the learning and the taste of my host. I pointed to them with a gesture which asked, "Are they not the work of your hand?" — "Nay," he answered, at once interpreting the gesture; "they were painted by a young friend of mine, now in Rome. I did but give him the general idea, sketched in crayons. I am fond of classical subjects, but not of mythological ones. I think that it is the mistake of artists, and perhaps of poets, who wish to be classical, to imagine that they must be mythological. We have no associations with Venus and Apollo, but we have associations

Digitized by Google

with the human life of which poets who believed in Venus and Apollo have left eternal impressions on our minds. For this world, I like the classical type of thought rather than the Gothic; for the classical type brightens and beautifies all that is conceived by our senses. But for all that is to set me thinking on the world to come, I prefer the Gothic type. Classical imagery would shock me in a chapel; Gothic imagery would offend me in a dining-room. I keep the two trains of idea apart. I dislike to confound the sensuous with the spiritual. I dedicate this room to Horace, because of all poets he is the one who imparts a sentiment at once the most subtle and the most hearty to that happy hour in the twenty-four in which we live back our youth at the sight of our old friends."

These remarks calling forth a reply from me, the conversation at first threatened to become, as it generally does the first day a stranger is introduced into a small family-party, somewhat too much of a dialogue between the host and the stranger. But in a short time other tongues were drawn into talk, and I, in my turn, became a listener. There was this notable distinction between the kind of conversation which I had just left behind me in London, and that which now interested my attention: in London dinners, no matter how well informed the guests, talk nearly always turns upon persons — here, talk turned upon things. The young painter talked well; so did Clara Thornhill. Now and then the Librarian threw in an odd, quaint, out-of-the-way scrap of erudition, delivered so like a joke that it made us merrier if it failed to make us wiser. Tracey himself was charming, never allowing

Digitized by Google

one subject to become tedious, and lighting up all subjects with a gaiety which, if it was not wit, was very much what wit might be, if something of ill-nature were not at the bottom of all the good sayings by which wit epigrammatises the epics and the dramas of human life.

We all left the dining-room together, men and women alike, according to the foreign fashion; we passed, not into the drawing room in which we had assembled before dinner, but into a library of such dimensions that I could not conceive how it could possibly belong to the house. Lady Gertrude laughed at my astonishment, and explained away its cause.

"You could not have guessed at the existence of this room," said she, "on seeing the exterior of the house, for it is screened from sight by the glazed colonnade behind which it extends. The fact is, when Percival built this house, he did not feel so sure that it would become his habitual residence as to transport hither the vast library he inherited, or has collected. It was not till we had been here two years that he determined on doing so; and as there was no room for so great a number of volumes in the building, and any large visible extension of the house would have spoilt its architectural symmetry, this gallery was run out at the back of the colonnade; and a very happy afterthought it was: it has become the favourite sitting-room. On one side (as you will see when we come to the centre of the room) it opens on the colonnade or statue gallery, and on the other side the view from the windows commands the most picturesque scenery of the park and the hills beyond, a striking contrast to the dressed ground of the gardens."

Digitized by Google

"And," said the Painter, "to my mind much more pleasing, for in all highly-dressed ground the eye becomes conscious of a certain monotony which is not found in the wilder landscapes, where the changes of prospect, which Nature is perpetually making, are more visible: I mean, that in these gardens, for instance, the most striking objects are the sculptured ornaments, the parterres, the fountains — the uniformity of art and plan; but in a natural landscape every varying shadow is noticed."

Here we had got into the middle of this vast gallery, and I caught sight, through an arched recess, from which the draperies were drawn aside, of the plants and statues in the adjoining colonnade. Tracey, who had lingered behind in conversation with Mrs. Thornhill, now joined us, and, passing his arm through mine, drew me into the colonnade, which was partially and softly lighted up. Some of its glazed compartments were left open, giving views of the gardens, with their terraces and fountains hushed in the stillness of the summer night. The rest of the party did not join us. Perhaps it was thought that such old friends, after so long a separation, might have much to say to each other which they would not wish to say before listeners. Nevertheless, we two walked for some minutes along the corridor in silence, Tracey leaving me to make acquaintance for myself, and unassisted by comment of his own, with the statues and antiquities, the inscriptions, the orange-trees, the aviaries, which made the society of the place. At length we paused to contemplate the gardens, and stepped out into the starlight. Then said Tracey, "I often think that we do not sufficiently cultivate the friendship of Night. We separate

Digitized by Google

the night by too sharp a line from the day. We close her out from us by shutters and curtains, and reject her stars for our lamps. Now, since I have lived here, I have learned that Night is a much more sociable companion than I before suspected. In summer I often ride out, even in winter often ramble forth, when my guests have been for hours in their beds. I take into my day impartially all the twenty-four hours. There are trains of thought set in motion by the sight of the stars which are dormant in the glare of the sun. And without such thoughts, Man's thinking is incomplete."

"I concede to you," said I, "the charm of Night; and I have felt the truth which you eloquently express; more especially, perhaps, when travelling alone in my younger days, and in softer climates than our own. But there arrives a time when one is compelled to admit that there is such a thing as rheumatism, and that even bronchitis is not altogether a myth. All mortals, my dear Tracey, are not blessed with your enviable health; and there is a proverb which warns us against turning night into day."

TRACEY. — "I suspect that the proverb applies to those who shut out the night the most — to students, wasting night in close chambers; to the gay folks of capitals, who imagine that it is very imprudent to breathe the fresh air after twelve o'clock, but perfectly safe to consume all the nitrogen, and exhaust all the oxygen, in the atmosphere of ball-rooms. The best proof that night air in itself is wholesome (I mean, of course, where the situation is healthy), may be found in the fact, that even delicate persons can, with perfect impunity, sleep with their windows open. And I

Digitized by Google

see that practice commended in the medical journals. The unhealthful time to be out is just before and just after sunset; yet that is precisely the time which the fashionable part of our population seem to prefer for exercise. Of course, however, I can only pretend to speak from experience. I do not study at night; the early hours of day seem to me the best for brain-work, and certainly they must be so for the eyesight. But I never discover that outdoor exercise at night injures my health; at my age, I should soon know if it did. My gamekeeper tells me he is never so well as at that part of the year when he is out half the night at watch over his preserves.* Be this as it may, I rejoice to find that I, at least, can safely follow out, in so pleasant a detail, the general system on which I planned the philosophy of my life in fixing my home remote from capitals, and concentring into confines as narrow as fate will permit, my resources of thought and of happiness."

"Your system?" said I; "that interests me; what is it?"

TRACEY. — "How many men we see, who, having cultivated their minds in capitals, retire into the country, and find themselves, after the novelty of change has worn away, either without amusement and object, or involuntarily deriving amusement and object from things that really belong, not to the pure country life, but to the life of the capital which they have left in body, but where they still are in mind. One rich man

* Of course I am not responsible for any opinions of Sir Percival Tracey's, with many of which I disagree; but as this whim of his about night perambulations is captivating and plausible, so I think it due to the health of my readers to warn them against subscribing to it without the approval of their medical advisers.

Digitized by Google

places his pleasure in receiving distinguished guests — viz., a certain number of inane persons with sonorous titles, variegated by wits *à la mode*, who import into the groves the petty scandals they learned at the clubs, or leading politicians who cannot walk in your stubbles without discharging on you the contents of a blue-book on agricultural statistics. Another man, not so rich, or not so desirous of putting the list of his guests into the 'Morning Post,' thinks he has discovered a cure for *ennui* in the country by luxuriating there in the vanities of an ambition which he could not gratify in the town. He can be a personage in a village — he is nobody in a capital. He finds to his satisfaction that the passions are hardy plants, and will thrive as well in the keen air of a sheepwalk as in the hothouse of London. Vanity and avarice proffer to him the artificial troubles which he calls 'natural excitements.' He cannot be an imperious statesman, but he may be a consequential magistrate; he cannot be a princely merchant, but he can be an anxious farmer, and invest the same fears of loss, and the same hopes of gain, in oats and turnips, which the merchant embarks in the vessels that interchange the products of nations. He says, 'How much better is the country life to the town life,' only because his vanity finds at quarter-sessions and vestries the consideration which would fail it in courts and senates; and his avarice has excitement and interest in the Short Horns on his home farm, and none in the Bulls and Bears on Exchange. How many other men, settling in the country, only vegetate there, having no living interest except in what passes in the city they have left; the only hour of the day to which they look forward with

Digitized by Google

"As we walk along these terraces, which no doubt, many a horticulturist would condemn as artificial, either I mistake, or all that Art has done here, unites yet more intimately Nature with the Mind of Man. For this seems to me the true excuse for what is called the artificial style of gardening — viz., that the statue, the fountain, the harmonies of form and colour into which even flower-beds are arranged, do bring Nature into more familiar connection with all which has served to cultivate, sweeten, elevate the Mind of Man. All his arts, and not one alone, speak here! What images from the old classic world of poetry the mere shape of yon urn, or the gleam of yon statue, calls forth! And even in those flower-beds, — what science has been at patient work, for ages, before the gracious forms by which Geometry alone can realise the symmetries of beauty, or the harmonies of hue and tint which we owe to research into the secrets of light and colour, — could have thus made Nature speak to us in the language of our choicest libraries, and symbolise, as it were, in the most pleasing characters, whatever is most pleasing in the world of books."

In these lengthened disquisitions Tracey had not been uninterrupted. I had, from time to time, interposed dissentient remarks, which, being of little consequence, I have wellnigh forgotten, and it seems to me best, therefore, to preserve unbroken the chain of his discourse. But here, I repeated to my host the Painter's observation on the monotony of dressed ground in comparison with scenery altogether left to Nature, and asked Tracey if he thought the observation true.

"I suspect," he answered, "that it is true or false, very much according to the degree to which the spec-

Digitized by Google

tator's mind has been cultivated by books, and reflections drawn from them. My friend the Painter is very young, and the extent of his reading, and, of course, the scope of his reflections, have been hitherto circumscribed. I think that artistic garden-ground does, after a time, more than wildly natural landscape, tire upon the eye not educated in the associations and reminiscences which preserve an artistic creation from monotony to the gaze of one who draws fresh charms from it out of his own mind — a mind which has accustomed itself to revive remembered images or combine new reflections, at every renewed contemplation of that art which comprises the æsthetic history of man's relationship with nature. Now, our Painter, habituated, very properly, to concentre his own thoughts on his own branch of art, observes, as something ever varying, the shadow that falls from the rude mountain top on the crags and dells of the old forest-land on the other side of the park, and does not observe that, as the sun shifts, it must equally bring out into new variations of light and shadow these lawns and flights of stairs; because he is not a painter of gardens, and he is a painter of forest scenery. Had he been a painter of gardens, he would have discovered variety in the garden, and complained of monotony in the forest-land. So let any man who has not cultivated his mind in the study of poems or pictures, be called upon to look every day at Milton's 'Paradise Lost,' or Raffaele's 'Virgin,' he will certainly find in either a very great sameness; but let a man who, being either a very great poet, a very great painter, or a very profoundly educated critic on poetry or painting, look every day at the said poem or the said picture, and he will

Digitized by Google

always find something new in what he contemplates — the novelty springing out of the fertility of perception which proceeds from the lengthened culture of his own taste. In short, there is nothing same or stale in any object of contemplation which is intimately allied to our own habits of culture; and that which is strange to those habits, becomes, however multiform and varying its charms to another may be, insipid and monotonous to ourselves, just as the world of ambition and of cities, with its infinite movement and play, to those whose lives are one study of it, is to me 'weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable,' as all its uses seemed to Hamlet."

Here our talk ended. Re-entering the library, we found Clara Thornhill at the piano, singing with exquisite spirit, and in the sweetest voice —

"Under the greenwood tree,
Who loves to lie with me," &c.

And so in song and music the rest of the evening wore away.

The next morning the sun shone into my windows so brightly that I rose at an earlier hour than I had been accustomed to do for months, and strolled into the gardens, interesting myself in considering the Painter's charge against dressed ground and Tracey's ingenious reply to it. The mowers were at work upon the lawns. Perhaps among rural sounds there is none which pleases me more than that of the whetting of the scythe — I suppose less from any music in itself, than from associations of midsummer, and hay-fields, and Milton's 'Allegro,' in which the low still sound is admitted among the joyous melodies of Morn. As the gardens opened upon me, with their variety of alleys

Digitized by Google

and bywalks, I became yet more impressed than I had been on the day before, with the art which had planned and perfected them, and the poetry of taste with which the images of the sculptor were so placed, that at every turn they recalled some pleasing but vague reminiscence of what one had seen in a picture, or in travel; or brought more vividly before the mind some charming verse in the poets, whose busts greeted the eye from time to time in bowery nook or hospitable alcove, where the murmur of a waterfall, or the view of a distant landscape opening from out the groves, invited pause and allured to contemplation.

At last, an arched trellis overhung with vine leaves led me out into that part of the park which fronted the library, and to which the Painter had given his preference over the grounds I had just quitted. There, the wildness of the scenery came on me with the suddenness of a surprise. The table-land, on which the house stood on the other side of the building, here abruptly sloped down into a valley through which a stream wound in many a maze, sometimes amidst jagged rocklike crags, sometimes through low grassy banks, round which the deer were grouping. The view was very extensive, but not unbrokenly so; here and there thick copses, in the irregular outline of natural groves, shut out the valley, but still left towering in the background the wavy hill-tops, softly clear in the blue morning sky. Hitherto I had sided with Tracey; now I thought the Painter right. In the garden, certainly, man's mind forms a visible link with Nature; but in those scenes of Nature not trimmed and decorated to the book-lore of man, Thought takes a less finite scope, and perhaps from its very vagueness

Digitized by Google

is less inclined to find monotony and sameness in the wide expanse over which it wanders to lose itself in reverie.

Descending the hillside, I reached the stream, and came suddenly upon Henry Thornhill, who, screened behind a gnarled old pollard-tree, was dipping his line into a hollow where the waves seemed to calm themselves, and pause before they rushed, in cascade, down a flight of crags, and thence brawled loudly onward.

As I know by experience how little an angler likes to be disturbed, I contented myself with a nod and a smile to the young man, and went my own way in silence; but about an hour afterwards, as I was winding back towards the house, I heard his voice behind me. I turned; he showed me, with some pride, his basket already filled with trout; and after I had sufficiently admired and congratulated, we walked slowly up the slope together. The evening before, Captain Thornhill had prepossessed me less than the other members of the party. He had spoken very little, and appeared to me to have that air of supreme indifference to all persons and things around him, which makes so many young gentlemen like — so many young gentlemen. But this morning he was frank and communicative.

"You have known Sir Percival very long, I think?" said he.

"Very long. I knew him before I had left Cambridge. In my rambles during a summer vacation, chance brought us together; and though he was then one of the most brilliant oracles of the world of fashion, and I an unknown collegian, somehow or other we became intimate."

Digitized by Google

"I suppose you find him greatly altered?"

"Do you mean in person or in mind?"

"Well, in both."

"In person less altered than I could have supposed; his figure just the same — as erect, as light, and seemingly as vigorous. In mind I cannot yet judge, but there is still the same sweetness, and the same cheerfulness; the same mixture of good-tempered irony and of that peculiar vein of sentiment which is formed by the combination of poetical feeling and philosophical contemplation."

"He is a very fine fellow," returned Henry Thornhill, with some warmth; "but don't you think it is a pity he should be so eccentric?"

"In what?"

"In what? Why, in that which must strike everybody; shirking his station, shutting himself up here, planning gardens which nobody sees, and filling his head with learning for which nobody is the wiser."

"His own friends see the gardens and enjoy them; his own friends may, I suppose, hear him talk, and become the wiser for his learning."

"His own friends — yes! a dozen or two individuals; most of them undistinguished as — as I am," added the young man, with visible bitterness. "And, with his talents and fortune, and political influence, he might be, or at least might have been, anything; don't you think so?"

"Anything is a bold expression; but if you mean that he might, if he so pleased, have acquired a very considerable reputation, and obtained a very large share of the rewards which ambitious men covet, I

Digitized by Google

have no doubt that he could have done so, and very little doubt that he could do so still."

"I wish you could stir him up to think it. I am vexed to see him so shelved in this out-of-the-way place. He has even given up ever going to Tracey Court now; and as for his castle in Ireland, he would as soon think of going to Kamtschatka."

"I hope, at all events, his estates, whether in the north or in Ireland, are not ill-managed."

"No, I must say that no estates can be better managed; and so they ought to be, for he devotes enormous sums to their improvement, as well as to all public objects in their district."

"It seems, then, that if he shirks some of the pomps of wealth, he does not shirk its duties?"

"Certainly not, unless it be the duty which a great proprietor owes to himself."

"What is that duty?"

The young man looked puzzled; at last he said —

"To make the most of his station."

"Perhaps Sir Percival thinks it is better to make the most of his mind, and fancies he can do that better in the way of life which pleases him, than in that which would displease; but he is lucky in stewards if his estates thrive so well without the watch of the master's eye."

"Yes, but his stewards are gentlemen — one, at Tracey Court, is a Mr. Aston, an old schoolfellow of Sir Percival, who was brought up to expect a fine property at the death of an uncle; but the uncle unluckily married at the age of fifty, and had a large family. Sir Percival heard he was in distress, and gave him this appointment; it just suits him. The

Digitized by Google

Irish steward, Mr. Gerrard, is also a capital fellow, who travelled in the East with Sir Percival. Being half Irish himself, Gerrard understands how to make the best of the population; and being half Scotch, he understands how to make the best of the property. I have no doubt that the estates are better managed in Sir Percival's absence than if he resided on them, for you know how good-natured he is. A bad tenant has only to get at his heart with a tale of distress, in order to renew his lease for whipping the land on his own terms."

"So then," said I, "we have come at last to this conclusion, that your wise relation, knowing his own character, in its merits and its failings, has done well in delegating to others, in whose probity and intellect he has a just confidence, the management of those affairs which he could not administer himself with equal benefit to all the persons interested. Is not that the way in which all states are governed? The wisdom of a king in absolute governments, or of a minister in free ones, is in the selection of the right persons for the right places; thus working out a wise system through the instrumentalities of those who best understand its details."

"Yes; but, talking of ministers, Sir Percival makes nothing of his political influence; he shuns all politics. Can you believe it? — he scarcely ever looks into the leading article of a newspaper!"

"To a man who has been long out of the way of party politics, there is not the interest in leading articles which you and I take."

"I rather think that Sir Percival does not like to

Digitized by Google

be reminded of politics, for fear he might be induced to take an interest in them."

"Ah, indeed! Why do you think so?

"Because, three years ago, Lady Gertrude was very anxious that he should claim the old barony of Ravenscroft, which has been in abeyance for centuries, but to which the heralds and lawyers assured him there could be no doubt of his proving his right. Lady Gertrude was so intent upon this that at one time I thought she would have prevailed. He looked into the case, invited the lawyers here, satisfied himself that the proof was clear, and then suddenly forbade all steps to be taken. Lady Gertrude told me that he said to her, 'For my family this honour is nought, since the title, if revived, would again die with me; but for myself it is a temptation to change, to destroy the mode of life in which I am happiest, and in which, on the whole, I believe I am morally the least imperfect. If I once took my seat in the Lords, a responsible legislator, how do I know that I should not want to speak, to act, to vie with others, and become ambitious if successful — and fretful if not?'"

"So he declined. Well, after all, a life most in harmony with a man's character is that in which he is probably not only the happiest, but the best man. Ambition is but noble in proportion as it makes men useful. But, from your own account, Tracey's private life is useful already, though its uses are not obtrusive. And for public life, three parts of the accomplishments, and perhaps of the virtues, which make his private life beautiful, would not be needed."

I uttered these defensive suggestions on behalf of my host somewhat in rebuke of the young relation

Digitized by Google

whose criticisms had called them forth, though in my own mind I felt a sort of melancholy regret that Percival's choice of life should be in walks so cool and sequestered, and the tenor of his way so noiseless. And did not his own fear to be tempted into more active exertions of intellect, if once brought under the influence of emulative competition, indicate that he himself also felt a regret, on looking back to the past, that he had acquired habits of mind to which the thought of distinction had become a sensation of pain?

When our party assembled at breakfast, Tracey said to me, "I had no idea you were so early a riser, or I would have given up my ride to share your rambles."

"Are you too, then, an early riser?"

"Yes, especially in summer. I have ridden twelve miles with Bourke to show him the remains of an old Roman tower which he has promised to preserve a few ages longer — in a picture."

Here the entrance of the letter-bag suspended conversation. The most eager for its opening was young Thornhill; and his countenance became at once overcast when he found there was no letter for him; as mine, no doubt, became overcast when I found a large packet of letters forwarded to me. I had left town long before the post closed; and two or three hours suffice to bring plenty of troublesome correspondents upon a busy Londoner. My housekeeper had forwarded them all. I think Lady Gertrude was the only other one of our party for whom the postman sped the soft intercourse from soul to soul. When I looked up from my letters, Henry Thornhill had already glanced rapidly over the panorama of the world,

Digitized by Google

displayed in the 'Times' newspaper, and, handing it to the Librarian, said disdainfully, "No news."

"No news!" exclaimed Caleb Danvers, after his own first peep — "no news! Why, Dr. ——'s great library is to be sold by auction on the 14th of next month!"

"That *is* interesting news," said Tracey. "Write at once for the catalogue."

"Any further criticism on the Exhibition of the Royal Academy?" asked the Painter, timidly.

"Two columns," answered Mr. Danvers, laconically.

"Oh," said the Painter, "that is interesting too."

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Danvers," said Lady Gertrude, "but will you glance at the foreign intelligence? Look to Germany; — anything about the Court of ——?"

"The Court of ——? yes, our minister there is convalescent, and going to Carlsbad next week."

"That's what I wanted to know," said Lady Gertrude. "My letter is from his dear sister, who is very anxious about him. Going to Carlsbad — I am glad to hear it."

Meanwhile Clara, who had possessed herself of the supplementary sheet, cried out, joyously — "O dear Henry, only think — Ellen has got a baby. How pleased they will be at the Grange! A son and heir at last!"

"Tut," growled Henry, breaking an egg-shell.

"So," said Tracey, "you see the 'Times' has news for every one except my friend here, who read in London yesterday what we in the country read to-day; and Captain Thornhill, who finds nothing that threatens to

Digitized by Google

break the peace of the world to the promotion of himself and the decimation of his regiment."

Henry laughed, but not without constraint, and muttered something about civilians being unable to understand the interest a soldier takes in his profession.

After breakfast, Tracey said to me, "Doubtless you have your letters to answer, and will be glad to have your forenoon to yourself. About two o'clock we propose adjourning to a certain lake, which is well shaded from the sun. I have a rude summer pavilion on the banks; there we can dine, and shun the Dogstar. Clara, who happily does not know that I am thinking of Tyndaris, will bring her lute, Aunt Gertrude her work, Bourke his sketch-book; and the lake is large enough for a sailing excursion, if Henry will kindly exchange, for the day, military repose for nautical activity."

All seemed pleased with the proposal except Henry, who merely shrugged his shoulders, and the party dispersed for the morning.

My letters were soon despatched, and my instincts or habits (which are, practically speaking, much the same thing) drew me into the library. Certainly it was a very noble collection of books, and exceedingly well arranged. Opening volume after volume, I found that most of those containing works of imperishable name were interleaved; and the side-pages thus formed were inscribed with critical notes and comments in my host's handwriting.

I was greatly struck with the variety and minuteness of the knowledge in many departments, whether of art, scholarship, or philosophy, which these anno-

Digitized by Google

tations displayed, and the exquisite critical discrimination and taste by which the knowledge was vivified and adorned. While thus gratifying my admiring curiosity, I was accosted by the Librarian, who had entered the room unobserved by me.

"Ay," said he, glancing over my shoulder at the volume in my hand — "Shakespeare; I see you have chanced there upon one of Sir Percival's most interesting speculations. He seeks first to prove how much more largely than is generally supposed Shakespeare borrowed, in detail, from others; and next, to show how much more patently than is generally supposed, Shakespeare reveals to us his own personal nature, his religious and political beliefs, his favourite sentiments and cherished opinions. In fact, it is one of Sir Percival's theories, that though the Drama is, of all compositions, that in which the author can least obtrude on us his personality, yet that of all dramatists Shakespeare the most frequently presents to us his own. Our subtle host seeks to do this by marking all the passages of assertion or reflection in Shakespeare's plays which are not peculiarly appropriate to the speaker, nor called for by the situation — often, indeed, purely episodical to the action; and where in such passages the same or similar ideas are repeated, he argues that Shakespeare himself is speaking, and not the person in the dialogue. I observe in the page you have opened, that Sir Percival is treating of the metaphysical turn of mind so remarkably developed in Shakespeare, and showing how much that turn of mind was the character of the exact time in which he lived. You see how appositely he quotes from Sir John Davies, Shakespeare's contemporary — who, though employed in active pro-

Digitized by Google

fessional pursuits, a lawyer — nay, even an Attorney-General and a Serjeant; a Member of Parliament, nay, even a Speaker, and in an Irish House of Commons — prepared himself for those practical paths of life by the composition of a poem the most purely and profoundly metaphysical which England, or indeed modern Europe, has ever produced: at this day it furnishes the foundation of all our immaterial schools of metaphysics. You will see, if you look on, how clearly Sir Percival shows that Shakespeare had intently studied that poem, and imbued his own mind, not so much with its doctrines, as with its manner of thought."

"Tracey was always fond of metaphysics, and of applying his critical acuteness to the illustration of poets. I am pleased to see he has, in the tastes of his youth, so pleasing a resource in his seclusion."

"But it is not only in metaphysics or poetry that he occupies his mind; you might be still more forcibly struck with his information and his powers of reasoning if you opened any of the historians he has interleaved — Clarendon, for instance, or our earlier Chronicles. I cannot but think he would have been a remarkable writer, if he had ever acquired the concentration of purpose, for which, perhaps, the idea of publishing what one writes is indispensably necessary."

"Has he never had the ambition to be an author?"

"Never since I have known him; and he never could conceive it now. You look as if you thought that a pity."

"Well, is it not a pity?"

"Sir," quoth the Librarian, taking snuff, "that is not a fair question to put to me, who have passed my life in reading books, and cherishing a humane com-

Digitized by Google

passion for those who are compelled to write them. But permit me to ask whether a very clever man, himself a voluminous writer, has not composed a popular work called the 'Calamities of Authors'? — did you ever know any writer who has composed a work on the 'Felicities of Authors'? Do you think, from your own experience, that you could write such a work yourself?"

"Rhetorically, yes; conscientiously, no. But let us hope that the calamities of authors lead to the felicities of readers."

Thus talking we arrived at the Librarian's own private sanctuary, a small study at the end of the library, looking on the wilder part of the park. Pointing to doors on the opposite side of a corridor, he said, "Those lead to Sir Percival's private apartments — they are placed in the Belvidere Tower, the highest room of which he devotes to his scientific pursuits; and those pursuits occupy him at this moment, for he expects a visit very shortly from a celebrated Swedish philosopher, with whom he has opened a correspondence."

I left the Librarian to his books, and took my way into the drawing-room. There I found only Clara Thornhill, seated by the window, and with a mournful shade on her countenance, which habitually was cheerful and sunny. I attributed the shade to the guilty Henry, and my conjecture proved right; for after some small-talk on various matters, I found myself suddenly admitted into her innocent confidence. Henry was unhappy! Unreasonable man! A time had been when Henry had declared that the supremest happiness of earth would be to call Clara his! Such happiness

Digitized by Google

then seemed out of his reach; Clara's parents were ambitious, and Henry had no fortune but "his honour and his sword." Percival Tracey, *Deus ex machinâ*, had stepped in — propitiated Clara's parents by handsome settlements. Henry's happiness was apparently secured. Percival had bestowed on him an independent income, had sought to domiciliate him in his own neighbourhood by the offer of a charming cottage which Tracey had built by the sea-side as an occasional winter residence for himself; had proposed to find him occupation as a magistrate — nay, as a commanding officer of gallant volunteers — in vain —

"He was all for deeds of arms;
Honour called him to the field."

The trophies of Miltiades would not suffer him to sleep.

Henry had been moving heaven and earth to get removed into a regiment which was ordered abroad, not exactly for what we call a war, but for one of those smaller sacrifices of human life which are always going on somewhere or other in distant corners of our empire, and make less figure in our annals than they do in our estimates. Such trivial enterprises might at least prepare his genius and expedite his promotion.

"Mox in reluctantes dracones," &c.

Percival, who was in secret league with Clara against this restlessness for renown which it is to be fervently hoped the good sense of Europe will refuse to gratify, had done his best, by a pleasant irony and banter, to ridicule Henry out of his martial discontent. In vain — Henry only resented his kinsman's disapproval of his honourable ambition, and hence his regret that Sir

Digitized by Google

Percival did not "make the most of his station." Surely, did he do so, a word from a man of such political importance in point of territory would have due effect on the Horse Guards. Henry thought himself entitled not only to a chance of fighting, but to the dignity of Major. All this, by little and little, though in her own artless words, and in wifelike admiration of Henry's military genius as well as ardour, I extracted from Clara, who (all women being more or less, though often unconsciously, artful in the confidences with which they voluntarily honour our sex) had her own reason for frankness; she had seen Sir Percival since breakfast, and he had sought to convince her that it would be wise to let Henry have his own way. The cunning creature wished me to reason with Tracey, and set before him all the dangers to limb and life to which even a skirmish with barbarians might expose a life so invaluable as her Henry's. "I could see him depart without a tear, if it were to defend his country," said she, with spirit. "But to think of all the hardships he most undergo in a savage land, and fighting for nothing I can comprehend, against a people I never heard of — *that* is hard! it is so reckless in him — and, poor dear, his health *is* delicate, though you would not think it!"

I promised all that a discreet diplomatist under such untoward circumstances could venture to promise; and on the Painter entering the room, poor Clara went up-stairs, trying her womanly best to smile away her tears.

Left alone with the artist, he drew my attention to some pictures on the wall which had been painted by Sir Percival, commended their gusto and brilliancy of

Digitized by Google

execution, and then said, "If our host had begun life on fifty pounds a-year, he would have been a great painter."

"Does it require poverty in order to paint well?"

"It requires, I suppose, a motive to do anything exceedingly well; and what motive could Sir Percival Tracey have to be a professed painter?"

"I think you have hit on the truth in his painting, and perhaps in his other accomplishments: all he wants is the concentration of motive."

"Is it not that want which makes three-fourths of the difference between the famous man and the obscure man?" asked the Painter.

"Perhaps not three-fourths; but if it make one-fourth, it would go a long way to account for the difference. One good of a positive profession is, that it supplies a definite motive for any movement which the intellect gives itself the trouble to take. He who enters a profession naturally acquires the desire to get on in it, and perhaps in the profession of art more ardently than in any other, because a man does not take to art from sheer necessity, and without any inclination for it, but *with* a strong inclination, to which necessity gives the patient forces of labour. I presume that I am right in this conjecture."

"Yes," said the Painter, ingenuously. "So far back as I can remember, I had an inclination, nay a passion, for painting; still I might not have gone through the requisite drudgery and apprenticeship; might not have studied the naked figure when I wished to get at once to some gorgeous draperies, or fagged at perspective when I wanted to deck out a sunset, if I had not had three sisters and a widowed mother to think of."

Digitized by Google

"I comprehend; but now that you have mastered the fundamental difficulties of your art, and accustomed yourself to hope for fame in the fuller and freer developments of that art, do you think that you would gladly accept the wealth of Sir Percival Tracey, on the condition that you were never to paint for the public, and to renounce every idea of artistic distinction? or, if you did accept that offer for the sake of your sisters and mother, would it be with reluctance and the pang of self-sacrifice?"

"I don't think I could accept such an offer on such conditions even for them. I am now, sir, utterly unknown — at best one of those promising pupils, of whom there are hundreds; but still I think there is a something in me as painter, as artist, which would break my heart if, some day or other, it did not force itself out."

"Then you would not lose your motive for becoming a great painter, even did you succeed to the wealth and station which you say deprive Sir Percival of a motive, supposing that, in accepting such gifts of fortune, you were *not* required to sacrifice the inclination you take from nature?"

"No, I should not lose the motive. Better famine in a garret than obscurity in a palace!"

Our conversation was here broken off by the entrance of Lady Gertrude. "It is just time for our expedition," said she. "I think it is about to strike two, and Percival is always punctual."

"I am quite ready," said I.

"And I shall be so in five minutes," cried the Painter; "I must run up-stairs for my sketch-book."

"Oh, I see what is keeping my nephew," said Lady

Digitized by Google

Gertrude, looking out of the window; and as I joined her she drew my attention to two figures walking slowly in the garden; in one I recognised Tracey, the other was unknown to me.

"He must have come by the early train," said Lady Gertrude, musingly. "I wonder whether he means to stay and go with us to the lake."

"You mean the gentleman in black?" said I; "I think not, whoever he may be, for, see, he is just shaking hands with Tracey like a man who is about to take leave. By his dress he seems a clergyman."

"Yes, don't betray me — Percival's London almoner. My nephew has employed him for seven years, and it is only within the last year that I discovered by accident what the employment is. He comes here when he likes — seldom stays over a day! One of those good men who are bored if they are not always about their work; and indeed he bores Percival by constantly talking of sorrow and suffering, which Percival is always wishing to relieve, but never wishes to hear discussed. You don't know to what a degree my nephew carries his foible!"

"What foible?"

"That of desiring everybody to be and to look happy. A year ago, his valet, who had lived with him since he came of age, died. I found him another valet, with the highest character — the best servant possible — not a fault to find with him; but he had a very melancholy expression of countenance. This fretted Percival; he complained to me. 'Dolman is unhappy or discontented,' he said. 'Find out what it is; remedy it.' I spoke to the poor man; he declared himself most satisfied, most fortunate in obtaining such a place. Still

Digitized by Google

he continued to look mournful. Percival could not stand it. One day he thrust a bank-note into the man's hand, and said, 'Go, friend, and before sunset look miserable elsewhere.'"

I was laughing at this characteristic anecdote, when Percival entered the room with his usual beaming aspect and elastic step. "Ready?" said he; "that's well: will you ride with me?" (this addressed to myself). "I have a capital sure-footed pony for you."

"I thought of giving your friend a seat in my pony-chaise," said Lady Gertrude.

Percival glanced at his aunt quickly, and replied, "So be it." I should have preferred riding with Tracey; but before he set off he whispered in my ear, "It makes the dear woman happy to monopolise a new-comer — otherwise ——" He stopped short, and I resigned myself to the pony-chaise.

"Pray," said Lady Gertrude, when we were fairly but slowly in movement along a shady road in the park, — "pray, don't you think it is very much to be regretted that Percival should be single — should never have married?"

"I don't know. He seems to me very happy as he is."

"Yes, happy, no doubt. I believe he would make himself happy in a dungeon; and ——" Lady Gertrude rather spitefully whipped the ponies.

"Perhaps," said I, as soon as I had recovered the first sensation of alarm, with which I am always seized when by the side of ladies who drive ponies and whip them — "perhaps," said I — "take care of that ditch — perhaps Percival has never seen the woman with whom it would be felicity to share a dungeon?"

Digitized by Google

"When you knew him first, while he was yet young, did you think him a man not likely to fall very violently in love?"

"Well, 'fall' and 'violently' are two words that I should never have associated with his actions at any time of life. But I should have said that he was a man not likely to form a very passionate attachment to any woman who did not satisfy his refinement of taste, which is exquisitely truthful when applied to poems and statues, but a little too classically perfect for just appreciation of flesh and blood, at least in that sex which is so charming that every defect in it is a shock on the *beau ideal*."

"Nevertheless," said Lady Gertrude, after acknowledging, with a gracious smile, the somewhat old-fashioned gallantry conveyed in my observations — "nevertheless, Percival has loved deeply and fervently, and, what may seem to you strange, has been crossed in his affections."

"Strange! Alas! in love nothing is strange. No one is *loved* for his merits any more than for his fortune or rank; but men, and women too, are *married* for their merits, and still more for their rank and their fortune. I can imagine, therefore, though with difficulty, a girl wooed by Percival Tracey not returning his love, but I cannot conceive her refusing his hand. How was it?"

"You see how I am confiding in you. But you are almost the only friend of his youth whom Percival has invited as his guest; and your evident appreciation of his worth at once opens my heart to you. In the course of that lengthened absence from England — on the eve of which you took leave of him nearly thirty

Digitized by Google

years ago — Percival formed a close friendship with a fellow-traveller in the East: Percival considers that to the courage, presence of mind, and devotion of this gentleman, a few years younger than himself, he owed his life in some encounter with robbers. Mr. Gerrard (that is this friend's name) was poor and without a profession. When Percival was about to return to Europe, he tried in vain to persuade Mr. Gerrard to accompany him — meaning, though he did not say so, to exert such interest with Ministers as he possessed, to obtain for Gerrard some honourable opening in the public service. The young man refused, and declared his intention of settling permanently at Cairo. Percival, in the course of his remonstrances, discovered that the cause of this self-exile was a hopeless attachment, which had destroyed all other objects of ambition in Gerrard's life, and soured him with the world itself. He did not, however, mention the name of the lady, nor the reasons which had deprived his affection of hope. Well, Percival left him at Cairo, and travelled back into Europe. At a German spa he became acquainted with an Irish peer who had run out his fortune, been compelled to sell his estates, and was living upon a small annuity allowed to him either by his creditors or his relations; a man very clever, very accomplished, not of very high principle, and sanguine of bettering his own position, and regaining the luxuries to which he had been accustomed, through some brilliant marriage, which the beauty of his only daughter might enable her to make. Beauty to a very rare degree she possessed — nor beauty alone; her mind was unusually cultivated, and her manners singularly fascinating. You guess already?"

Digitized by Google

"Yes. Percival saw here one with whom he did not *fall* in love, but for whom he *rose into love.* He found his ideal."

"Exactly so. I need not say that the father gave him all encouragement. Percival was on the point of proposing when he received a letter from Mr. Gerrard (to whom he had written, some weeks before, communicating the acquaintance he had made, and the admiration he had conceived); and the letter, written under great excitement, revealed the object of Gerrard's hopeless attachment. Of Irish family himself, he had known this young lady from her childhood — and from her childhood loved her. He had been permitted to hope by Lord ——, who was at that time in a desperate struggle to conceal or stave off his ruin, and who did not scruple to borrow from his daughter's suitor all that he could extract from him. Thus, when the final crash came, Lord ——'s ruin involved nearly the whole of Gerrard's patrimony; and, of course, Lord —— declared that a marriage was impossible between two young persons who had nothing to live upon. It was thus that Edmund Gerrard had become an exile.

"This intelligence at once reversed the position of the rivals. From that moment Percival devoted himself to bless the life of the man who had saved his own. How he effected this object I scarcely know; but Lord —— gave his consent to Gerrard's suit, and lived six years longer with much pomp and luxury in Paris. Gerrard settled with his wife in Percival's Irish castle, and administers Percival's Irish estates, at a salary which ranks him with the neighbouring gentry. But Percival never visits that property — I do not

Digitized by Google

think he would trust himself to see the only woman he ever loved as the wife of another, though she is no longer young, and is the mother of children, whose future fortunes he has, doubtless, assured."

"What you tell me," said I, with emotion, "is so consistent with Tracey's character that it gives me no surprise. That which does surprise me is, not the consent of the ruined father, but the consent of the accomplished daughter. Did Percival convince himself that she preferred his rival?"

"That is a question I can scarcely answer. My own belief is, that her first fancy had been caught by Gerrard, and that she had given him cause to believe that that first fancy was enduring love; but that, if her intimate acquaintance with Percival had continued longer, and had arrived at a stage at which his heart had been confessed to her, and her own heart frankly wooed, the first fancy would not have proved enduring love. But the acquaintance did not reach to that stage; and I have always understood that her marriage has been a very happy one."

"In that happiness Tracey is consoled?"

"Yes, now, no doubt. But I will tell you this, that as soon as all obstacles to the marriage were removed, and Gerrard on his way from the East, Percival left Germany and reached Lausanne, to be seized with a brain fever, which threatened his life, and from the effects of which it was long before he recovered. But answer me candidly one question, Do you think it is too late in life for him to marry yet?"

Poor Lady Gertrude asked this question in so pleading a tone of voice, that I found it very difficult to

Digitized by Google

answer with the candour which was insisted on as the condition of my reply. At length I said, bravely —

"My dear Lady Gertrude, if a man hard upon sixty chooses to marry, it becomes all his true friends to make the best of it, and say that he has done a wise thing. But if asked beforehand whether it be not too late in life for such an experiment, a true friend must answer, 'Yes.'"

"Yet there have been very happy marriages with great disparity of years," said Lady Gertrude, musingly, "and Percival is very young for his age."

"Excellent after-reflections, if he do marry. But is he not very happy as he is? I know not why, but you all seem to conspire against his being happy in his own way. One of you wants him to turn politician, another to turn Benedict. For my part, the older I grow, the more convinced I am of the truth of one maxim — whether for public life or for private— 'Leave well alone.'"

By this time we had arrived into the heart of a forest that realised one's dreams of Ardens; a young man would have looked round for a Rosalind, a moralising sage for a Jaques. Many a green vista was cut through the mass of summer foliage, and in full view before us stretched a large wild lake; its sides, here and there, clothed with dipping trees or clustered brushwood. On the opposite margin, to which, in a neck of the lake, a rustic bridge gave access, there was a long and picturesque building, in the style of those quaint constructions of white plaster and black oak beams and rafters, which are still seen in Cheshire, but with ruder reliefs of logwood pilasters and balconies; a charming, old-fashioned garden stretched before it, rich in the

Digitized by Google

genuine English flowers of the Elizabethan day; and scattered round, on inviting spots, were lively-coloured tents and awnings. The heron rose alarmed from the reeds as we drew near the water; but the swans, as if greeting the arrival of familiar friends, sailed slowly towards us. Tracey had already arrived at the cottage, and we saw him dismounting at the door, and talking to an old couple who camē out to meet and welcome him.

"I believe," said Lady Gertrude, "that Percival's secret reason for building that cottage was to place in it those two old servants from Tracey Court. They had known him there when he was a boy, and are so attached to him that they implored him to let them serve him wherever he resided. But they were too old and too opinionated to suit our moderate establishment, which does not admit of supernumeraries, so he suddenly found out that it would be very pleasant to have a forest lodge for the heats of summer, built that house, and placed them in it. The old woman, who was housekeeper at Tracey Court, is, however, as I hope you will acknowledge, a very good cook on these holiday occasions; and her husband, who was butler there, is so proud and so happy to wait on us, that —. But no doubt you understand how young it makes us old folks feel, to see those who remember us in our youth; and to whom we are still young."

Our party now assembled in front of the forest lodge, and the grooms took back the ponies, with orders to return before nightfall. Tracey carried me over the lodge, while Henry Thornhill and the Painter busied themselves with a small sailing vessel which rode at anchor in a tiny bay.

Digitized by Google

This rustic habitation was one for which two lovers might have sighed. Its furniture very simple, but picturesquely arranged, with some of those genuine relics of the Elizabethan age, or perhaps rather that of James I., which are now rarely found, though their Dutch imitations are in every curiosity-shop. As in the house we had left there was everywhere impressive the sentiment of the classic taste, so here all expressed the sentiment of that day in our own history which we associate with the poets, who are *our* most beloved classics. It was difficult, when one looked round, to suppose that the house could have been built and furnished by a living contemporary; it seemed a place in which Milton might have lodged when he wrote the 'Lycidas,' or Izaak Walton and Cotton have sought shelter in the troubled days of the Civil War, with a sigh of poetic regret as they looked around, for the yet earlier age when Sidney escaped from courts to meditate the romance of 'Arcadia.'

"I have long thought," said Tracey, "that if we studied the secrets of our English climate a little more carefully than most of us do, we could find, within a very small range, varieties of climate which might allow us to dispense with many a long journey. For instance, do you not observe how much cooler and fresher the atmosphere is here than in the villa yonder, though it is but five miles distant? Here, not only the sun is broken by the forest-trees, but the ground is much more elevated than it is yonder. We get the bracing air of the northern hills, to which I have opened the woods, and here, in the hot relaxing days of summer, I often come for days or weeks together. The lodge is not large enough to admit more than two, or

Digitized by Google

at most three other visitors, and therefore it is only very intimate friends whom I can invite. But I always look forward to a fortnight or so here, as a time to be marked with the whitest chalk, and begin to talk of it as soon as the earliest nightingale is heard. Again, on the other extremity of my property, by the sea-side, I have made my winter residence, my Tarentum, my Naples, my Nice. There, the aspect is due south — cliffs, ranged in semicircle, form an artificial screen from the winds and frosts. The cottage I have built there is a sun-trap. At Christmas I breakfast in a bower of geraniums, and walk by hedgerows of fuchsia and myrtle. All this is part of my philosophical plan, on settling down for life — viz., to collect all the enjoyments this life can give me into the smallest possible compass. Before you go, you must see my winter retreat. I should like to prove to you how many climates, with a little heed, an Englishman may find within a limit of twenty miles. I had thought of giving Bellevue (my sea-side cottage) to the Thornhills, and delighted in the thought of becoming their guest in the winter, for aunt Gertrude does not fancy the place as I do, and wherever I go I cannot live quite alone, nor quite without that humanising effect of drawing-room scenery, which the play-writers call 'petticoat interest.' But when a man allows himself to be selfish, he deserves to be punished. Henry Thornhill disdains Bellevue and comfort, and insists on misery and bivouacs."

"Ah, my dear Tracey," said I, mindful of my promise to Clara, "Henry Thornhill is much too fine a young fellow to be wasted upon ignoble slaughter, and still more ignoble agues and marsh fevers. I hope you

Digitized by Google

do not intend to gratify his preposterous desire to plant laurels at the other end of the world, and on soil in which it may be reasonably doubted whether any laurels will grow —"

Tracey's brow became clouded. He threw himself on a seat niched into the recess of a lattice window, looked out at first abstractedly, and then, as the cloud left his brow, observantly.

'See, my dear friend," said he — "see, how listlessly, for a mere holiday pleasure, that brave lad is running up the sails. Do you think that he would be thus indifferent if he were clearing decks for a fight — if responsibility, and honour, and duty, and fame were his motive powers? No. If he stayed at home inactive he would be miserable the more Clara and I tried to make him happy in our holiday way. That which a man feels, however unphilosophically (according to other men's philosophy), to be an essential to the object for which he deems it noble to exist — that the man must do, or at least attempt; if we prevent him, we mar the very clockwork of his existence, for we break its mainspring. Henry must have his own way. And I say that for Clara's sake; for if he has not, he will seek excitement in something else, and become a bad man and a very bad husband."

"Hem!" said I; "of course you know him best; but I own I do not see in him a genius equal to his restlessness or his ambition; and I think his wife very superior to himself in intellect. If, besides giving him your sea-side villa, you gave him a farm, surely he might become famous for his mangol-wurzel; and it is easier for all men, including even Henry Thornhill, to grow capital wurzel than it is to beat Hannibal or Wellington."

Digitized by Google

"Pish!" said Tracey, smiling, "you ought to know mankind too well to think seriously what you say in sarcasm. Pray, where and what would England be if every sharp young fellow in the army did not set a Hannibal or a Wellington before his eyes; or if every young politician did not haunt his visions with a Pitt, a Fox, or a Burke? What Henry Thornhill may become, Heaven only knows; but if you could have met Arthur Wellesley before he went to India, do you think you would have guessed that he would become the hero of England? Can any of us detect beforehand the qualities of a man of action? — Of a man of letters, yes; to a certain degree, at least. We can often, though not always, foresee whether a man may become a great writer; but a great man of action — no!! Henry has no literature, no literary occupation, nor even amusement. Probably Hannibal had none, and Wellington very little. *Bref* — he thinks his destiny is action, and military action. Every man should have a fair chance of fulfilling what he conceives to be his destiny. Suppose Henry Thornhill fail; what then? He comes back, reconciled to what fate will still tender him — reconciled to my sea-side villa — to his charming wife — reconciled to life as it *is* for him. But now he is coveting a life which *may* be. A man only does that which fate intends him to do, in proportion as he obeys the motive which gives him his power in life. Henry Thornhill's motive is military ambition. It is no use arguing the point — what man thinks, he is."

I bowed my head. I felt that Tracey was right, and sighed aloud, "Poor little Clara!"

"Poor little Clara!" said Tracey, sighing also,

Digitized by Google

"must, like other poor dear little loving women, take her chance. If her Henry succeed, how proud she will be to congratulate him! if he fail, how proud she will be to console him!"

"Ah, Tracey!" said I, rising, "in all you have said I recognise your acute discernment and your depth of reasoning. But when you not only concede to, but approve, the motive power which renders this young man restless, pray forgive so old a friend for wondering why you yourself have never found some motive power which might, long ere this, have rendered you renowned."

"Hush!" said Tracey, with his winning, matchless smile — "hush, look out on yon woods and waters. Has not the life which Nature bestows on any man who devoutly loves her a serener happiness than can be found in the enjoyments that estrange us from her charms? How few understand the distinction between life artificial and life artistic! Artificial existence is a reverence for the talk of men; artistic existence is in the supreme indifference to the talk of men. You and I, in different ways, seek to complete our being on earth, not artificially, but artistically. Neither of us can be an insincere mouthpiece of talk in which we have no faith. You cannot write in a book — you cannot say in a speech — that which you know to be a falsehood. But the artificial folks are the very echoes of falsehood; the noise they make is in repeating its last sounds. An artist must be true to nature, even though he add to nature something from his soul of man which nature cannot give in her representations of truth. Is it not so?"

"Certainly," said I, with warmth. "I could neither

Digitized by Google

write nor speak what I did not believe to be, in the main, truthful. A man may or may not, according to the quality of his mind, give to nature that which clearly never can be in nature — viz., the soul or the intellect of man; but soul or intellect he must give to nature — that is, to everything which external objects present to his senses as truthful — or he is in art a charlatan, and in action a knave. But then Truth, as Humanity knows it, is not what the schoolmen call it, One and Indivisible; it is like light, and splits not only into elementary colours, but into numberless tints. Truth with Raffaele is not the same as truth with Titian; truth with Shakespeare is not the same as truth with Milton; truth with St. Xavier is not the same as truth with Luther; truth with Pitt is not the same as truth with Fox. Each man takes from life his favourite truth, as each man takes from light his favourite colour."

"Bravo!" cried Tracey, clapping his hands.

"Why bravo?" cried I, testily. "Can the definition I hazard be construed into a defence of what I presume to be your view of the individual allegiance which each man owes to truth as he conceives it? No; for each man is bound to support and illustrate, with all his power, truth as truth seems to him, Raffaele as Raffaele, Titian as Titian, Shakespeare as Shakespeare, Milton as Milton, Pitt as Pitt, Fox as Fox. And the man who says, 'I see truth in my own way, and I do not care to serve her cause;' who, when Nature herself ever moving, ever active, exhorts him to bestir himself for the truth he surveys, and to animate that truth with his own life and deed, shrugs his shoulder, and cries '*Cui bono?*' — that man, my dear Tracey, may

Digitized by Google

talk very finely about despising renown, but in reality he shuffles off duty. Pardon me; I am thinking of you. I would take your part against others; but as friend to friend, and to your own face, I condemn you."

To this discourteous speech Tracey was about to reply, when Lady Gertrude and Clara Thornhill entered the room to tell us that the boat was ready, and that we had less than two hours for aquatic adventure, as we were to dine at five.

"I am not sorry to have a little time to think over my answer to those reproaches which are compliments on the lips of friends," said Tracey to me, resting his arm on my shoulder; and in a few minutes more we were gliding over the lake, with a gentle breeze from the hills, just lively enough to fill the sail. Clara, bewitchingest of those womanliest women who unfairly enthral and subdue us, while we not only know that their whole hearts are given to another, but love and respect them the more for it, — Clara nestled herself by my side. And I had not even the satisfaction of thinking that that infamous Henry was jealous. He did indeed once or twice pause from his nautical duties to vouchsafe us a scowl; but it was sufficiently evident that the monster was only angry because he knew that Clara loved him so well that she was seeking to enlist me on her side against his abominable ambition of learning the art of homicide.

"Well," whispered Clara to me — "well, you have spoken to Sir Percival!"

"Alas, yes! and in vain. He thinks that for your sake Henry must fulfil that dream of heroism, which perhaps first won your heart to him. Women very

Digitized by Google

naturally love heroes; but then they must pay the tax for that noble attachment. Henry must become the glory of his country, and a major of a regiment in active service. My dear child — I mean, my dear Mrs. Thornhill — don't cry; be a hero's wife. Tracey has convinced me that Henry is right; and my firm belief is that the chief motive which makes Henry covet laurels is to lay them at your feet."

"The darling!" murmured Clara.

"You see your parents very naturally wished you to make a better worldly marriage. That difficulty was smoothed over, not by the merits of Henry, but the money of Sir Percival Tracey. Could you respect your husband if he were not secretly chafed at that thought? He desires to lift himself up to you even in your parents' eyes, not by a miserable pecuniary settlement effected through a kinsman, but by his own deeds. Oppose that, and you humiliate him. Never humiliate a husband. Yield to it, and you win his heart and his gratitude for ever. Man must never be put into an inferior position to his helpmate. Is not that true? Thank you, my child — (come, the word is out) — for that pressure of my hand. You understand us men. Let Henry leave you, sure that his name will be mentioned with praise in his commanding officer's report after some gallant action, looking forward to the day when, in command himself, Parliament shall vote him its thanks, and its Sovereign award him her honours; and your Henry, as you cling in pride to his breast, shall whisper in words only heard by you — 'Wife mine, your parents are not ashamed of me now! All this is your work! all results from the yearning desire to show that the man whom you had

Digitized by Google

singled out from the world was not unworthy of your love!'"

"But Henry does not say those pretty things," sighed Clara, half smiling, half weeping.

"Say them? In words, of course not. What man, and especially what Englishman, does say pretty things to his wife? It is only authors, who are the interpreters of hearts, that say what lovers and heroes feel. But a look says to the beloved one more than authors can put into words. Henry's look will tell you what you, his own, his wife, have been to him in the bivouac, in the battle; and you will love and reverence him the more because he does not say the pretty things into which I mince and sentimentalise the calm Englishman's grand, silent, heartfelt combination of love with duty and with honour. My dear Clara, I speak to you as I would to my own daughter. Let your young soldier go. You and I indeed — the woman and the civilian — may talk as we will of distinctions between the defence of the island and the preservation of the empire. But a soldier is with his country's flag wherever it is placed — whether in the wilds of Caffraria or on the cliffs of Dover. Clara, am I not right? Yes! you again press my hand. After all, there is not a noble beat in the heart of man which does not vibrate more nobly still in the heart of the wife who loves him!"

Just at this time our little anchor dropped on a fairy island. There was as much bustle on board as if we had discovered a new Columbia. We landed for a few minutes to enjoy a glorious view of the lake, to which this island was the centre, and explore a curious cave, which, according to tradition, had been the dwelling of some unsocial anchorite in Gothic days.

Digitized by Google

The rocky walls of this cell were now inscribed with the names or initials of summer holiday visitors from provincial towns.

"See," said the Painter, "how instinctive to man is the desire to leave some memorial of himself wherever he has been."

"Do you acknowledge then," said Tracey, "that the instinct which roused Joseph Higgins to carve on the rock, for the benefit of distant ages, the fact, that in the year 1837 he visited this spot in company with 'Martha Brown,' is but a family branch of the same instinct which makes genius desire to write its name on the 'flammantia mœnia mundi'?"

"Perhaps," replied the Painter, "the instinct is the same; but if it be so, that truth would not debase and vulgarise the yearning of genius — it would rather elevate and poetise the desire of Joseph Higgins."

"Well answered," said I. "Has any one present a knife that he will not mind blunting? if so, I should like to carve my name under that of Joseph Higgins. It is something to leave a trace of one's whereabout twenty years hence, even in the rock of this lonely cave."

Henry produced the knife, and I carved my name under that of Joseph Higgins, with the date, and these words — "A Summer Holiday." "I have not had many holidays," said I, "since I left school; let me preserve one from oblivion." I passed the knife to Tracey.

"Nay," said he, laughing. "I have no motive strong enough to induce me to take the trouble. I have no special holiday to record — my life is all holiday."

Digitized by Google

We re-entered our vessel, and drifted along the lake — the Painter jotting down hints of scenery in his sketch-book, and Percival reading to us aloud from a volume of Robert Browning's Poems which he had brought with him. He was a great admirer of that poet, and was bent upon making Clara share his own enthusiasm. Certainly he read well, and the poems he selected seemed in harmony with the scene; for there is in Robert Browning a certain freshness and freedom of music, and a certain suggestiveness of quiet thought reflected from natural images, which fit him to be read out of doors, in English landscapes, on summer days.

When we returned from our cruise, we found our rural banquet awaiting us. We were served under an awning suspended from the trunks of two mighty elms, whose branches overhung the water. Lady Gertrude had not exaggerated the culinary skill of the *ci-devant* housekeeper. What with the fish from the lake, various sorts, dressed in different ways, probably from receipts as old as the monastic days in which fresh-water fishes received the honours due to them — what with some excellent poultry, which, kept in that wild place, seemed to have acquired a finer flavour than farmyard coops bestow — and what with fruits, not rendered malefic by walls of pastry — the repast would have satisfied more refined epicures than we were. Cool, light, sparkling wines, innocent as those which Horace promised to Tyndaris, circled freely. All of us became mirthful, even Clara — all of us except Henry, who still looked as if he were wasting time; and the Painter, who became somewhat too seriously obtrusive of his art, and could with difficulty be kept from merging

Digitized by Google

the whole conversation into criticisms on the landscape effects of Gainsborough contrasted with those of Claude.

After dinner we quietly settled ourselves to our several amusements — Lady Gertrude to some notable piece of female work. Clara, after playing us a few airs on her lute, possessed herself of Tracey's volume of Browning, and pretended to read. The Painter flung himself on the grass, and contemplated with an artist's eye the curves in the bank, and the lengthening shadows that crept over the still waters. Henry, ever restless, wandered away with a rod in his hand towards a distant gravelly creek, in which the old man at the lodge assured us he had seen perch of three pounds weight.

The Librarian alone remained seated at the table, finishing very slowly his bottle of claret, and apparently preparing himself for a peaceful slumber.

Tracey and I strolled along the margin of the lake, the swans following us as we walked: they were old friends of his.

"So," said Tracey at last, "you think that my course of life has not been a wise one."

"If all men lived like you, it might be very well for a paradise, but very bad for the world we dwell in."

"Possibly; but it would be very bad for the world we dwell in if the restless spirits were not in some degree kept in check by the calm ones. What a miserable, unsafe, revolutionary state of society would be that in which all the members were men of combative ambition and fidgety genius; all haranguing, fighting, scribbling; all striving, each against the other! We

Digitized by Google

sober fellows are the ballast in the state vessel: without us, it would upset in the first squall! We have our uses, my friend, little as you seem disposed to own it."

"My dear Tracey, the question is not whether a ship should carry ballast, but whether you are of the proper material for ballast. And when I wonder why a man of great intellect and knowledge should not make his intellect and knowledge more largely useful, it is a poor answer to tell me that he is as useful as — a bag of stones."

"A motive power is as necessary to impel a man, whatever his intellect or knowledge, towards ambitious action, as it is to lift a stone from the hold of a vessel into the arch of a palace. No motive power from without urges me into action, and the property inherent in me is to keep still."

"Well, it is true, yours is so exceptional a lot that it affords no ground for practical speculation of human life. Take a patrician of £60,000 a-year, who only spends £6000: give him tastes so cultivated that he has in himself all resources; diet him on philosophy till he says, with the Greek sage, 'Man is made to contemplate, and to gaze on the stars,' and it seems an infantine credulity to expect that this elegant Looker-on will condescend to take part with the actors on the world's stage. Yet without the actors, the world would be only a drop-scene for the Lookers-on. Yours, I repeat, is an exceptional case. And those who admire your mind, must regret that it has been robbed of fame by your fortune."

"Flatterer," said Tracey, with his imperturbable good-temper, "I am ashamed of myself to know that

Digitized by Google

you have not hit on the truth. If I had been born to £200 a-year, and single as I am now — that is, free to choose my own mode of life — I should have been, I was about to say as idle as I am, but idle is not the word; I should have been as busy in completing my own mind, and as reluctant to force that mind into the squabbles of that mob which you call the world: in fact, I am but a type — somewhat exaggerated by accidental circumstances, which make me more prominent than others to your friendly if critical eye — of a very common and a very numerous class in a civilisation so cultivated as that of our age. Wherever you look, you will find men whom the world has never heard of, yet who in intellect or knowledge could match themselves against those whose names are in all the newspapers. Allow me to ask, Do you not know, in the House of Commons, men who never open their lips, but for whose mere intellect, in judgment, penetration, genuine statesmanship, you have more respect than you have for that of the leading orators? Allow me to ask again, Should you say the profoundest minds and the most comprehensive scholars are to be found among the most popular authors of your time; or among men who have never published a line, and never will? Answer me frankly."

"I will answer you frankly. I should say that, in political judgment and knowledge, there are many men in the back benches of Parliament, who are the most admirable critics of the leading statesmen. I should say that, in many educated, fastidious gentlemen, there are men who, in exquisite taste and extensive knowledge, are the most admirable critics of the popular authors. But still there is an immense difference in

Digitized by Google

human value between even a first-rate critic who does not publish his criticisms, and even a second or third-rate statesman or author who does contribute his quota of thought to the intellectual riches of the world."

"Granted; but the distinction, between man and man, in relation to the public, is not mere intellect, nor mere knowledge; it is in something else. What is it?"

"Dr. Arnold, the schoolmaster, said, that as between boy and boy the distinction was energy, perhaps it is so with men."

"Energy! yes: but what puts the energy into movement? what makes one man dash into fame by a harum-scarum book full of blunders and blemishes, or a random fiery speech, of which any sound thinker would be heartily ashamed; and what keeps back the man who could write a much better book and make a much better speech?"

"Perhaps," said I, ironically, "that extreme of elegant vanity, an over-fastidious taste; perhaps that extreme of philosophical do-nothingness, which always contemplates and never acts."

"Possibly you are right," answered Tracey, shaming my irony by his urbane candour. "But why has the man this extreme of elegant vanity or philosophical do-nothingness? Is it not, perhaps, after all, a physical defect? The lymphatic temperament instead of the nervous-bilious?"

"You are not lymphatic," said I, with interest; for my hobby is — metaphysical pathology, or pathological metaphysics — "You," said I, "are not lympathic; you are dark-haired, lean, and sinewy; why the deuce should you not be energetic! it must be that infamous

Digitized by Google

£60,000 a-year which has paralysed all your motive power."

"Friend," answered Tracey, "are there not some men in the House of Lords with more than £60,000 a-year, and who could scarcely be more energetic if they lived on 4d. a-day and worked for it?"

"There have been, and are, such instances in the Peerage, doubtless; but, as a general rule, the wealthiest peers are seldom the most active. Still, I am willing to give your implied argument the full benefit of the illustration you cite. Wherever legislative functions are attached to hereditary aristocracy, that aristocracy, as long as the State to which they belong is free, will never fail of mental vigour — of ambition for reputation and honours achieved in the public service. It was so with the senators of Rome as long as the Roman Republic lasted; it will be so with the members of the House of Lords as long as the English Constitution exists. And in such an order of men there will always be a degree of motive power sufficiently counteracting the indolence and epicurism which great wealth in itself engenders, to place a very large numerical proportion of the body among the most active and aspiring spirits of the time. But your misfortune, my dear Tracey, has been this (and hence I call your case exceptional) — that, immeasurably above the average of our peers, both as regards illustrious descent and territorial possessions, still you have had none of the duties, none of the motive power, which actuate hereditary legislators. You have had their wealth — you have had their temptations to idleness; you have not had their responsible duties — you have not had their

Digitized by Google

motives for energy and toil. That is why I call your case exceptional."

"Still," answered Tracey, "I say that I am but a very commonplace type of educated men who belong neither to the House of Lords nor the House of Commons, and who, in this country, despise ambition, yet in some mysterious latent way serve to influence opinion. Motive power — motive power! how is it formed? why is it so capricious? why sometimes strongest in the rich and weakest in the poor? why does knowledge sometimes impart, and sometimes destroy it? On these questions I do not think that your reasonings will satisfy me. I am sure that mine would not satisfy you. Let us call in a third party and hear what he has to say on the matter. Ride with me to-morrow to the house of a gifted friend of mine, who was all for public life once, and is all for private life now. I will tell you who and what he is. In early life my friend carried off the most envied honours of a university. Almost immediately on taking his degree, he obtained his fellowship. Thus he became an independent man. The career most suited to his prospects was that of the Church. To this he had a conscientious objection; not that he objected to the doctrines of our Church, nor that he felt in himself any consciousness of sinful propensities at variance with the profession; but simply because he did not feel that strong impulse towards the holiest of earthly vocations, without which a very clever man may be a very indifferent parson: and his ambition led him towards political distinction. His reputation for talents, and for talents adapted to public life, was so high, that he received an offer to be brought into Parliament, at the first general election,

Digitized by Google

from a man of great station, with whose son he had been intimate at college, and who possessed a predominant influence in a certain borough. The offer was accepted. But before it could be carried out, a critical change occurred in my friend's life and in his temper of mind. He came suddenly and unexpectedly into the succession to a small estate in this county, which had belonged for several generations to a distant branch of his family. On taking possession of the property, he naturally made acquaintance with the rector of the parish, and formed a sudden and passionate attachment for one of the rector's daughters, resigned the fellowship he no longer needed, married the young lady, and found himself so happy with his young partner and in his new home, that before the general election took place, the idea of the parliamentary life, which he had before coveted, became intolerable to him. He excused himself to the borough and its patron, and has ever since lived as quietly in his rural village as if he had never known the joys of academical triumph, nor nursed the hope of political renown. Let us then go and see him to-morrow (it is a very pretty ride across the country), and you will be compelled to acknowledge that his £600 or £700 a-year of wood and sheepwalk, with peace and love at his fireside, have sufficed to stifle ambition in one whose youth had been intensely ambitious. So you see it does not need £60,000 a-year to make a man cling to private life, and shrink from all that, in shackling him with the fetters and agitating him with the passion of public life, would lessen his personal freedom and mar his intellectual serenity."

"I shall be glad to see your friend. What is his name?"

Digitized by Google

"Hastings Gray."

"What! the Hastings Gray who, seventeen or eighteen years ago, made so remarkable a speech at some public meeting (I own I forget where it was), and wrote the political pamphlet which caused so great a sensation!"

"The same man."

"I remember that he was said to have distinguished himself highly at the university, and that he was much talked of in London, for a few weeks, as a man likely to come into Parliament, and even to make a figure in it. Since then, never having heard more of him, I supposed he was dead. I am glad to learn that he only sleepeth."

Here we heard behind us the muffled fall of hoofs on the sward; our party was in movement homeward, Lady Gertrude leading the van in her pony chaise. I had to retake my place by her side; Clara and the Librarian followed in a similar vehicle, driven by Henry Thornhill, who had caught none of the great perches; I suspect he had not tried for them. Percival and the Painter rode. The twilight deepened, and soon melted into a starry night, as we went through the shadowy forest-land.

Lady Gertrude talked incessantly and agreeably, but I was a very dull companion, and, being in a musing humour, would much rather have been alone. At length we saw the moon shining on the white walls of the villa. "I fear we have tired you with our childish party of pleasure," said Lady Gertrude, with a malicious fling at my silence.

"Perhaps I am tired," I replied, ingenuously.

Digitized by Google

"Pleasures are fatiguing, especially when one is not accustomed to them."

"Satirist!" said Lady Gertrude. "You come from the brilliant excitements of London, and what may be pleasure to us must be *ennui* to you."

"Nay, Lady Gertrude, let me tell you what a very clever and learned man, a Minister of State, said the other day at one of those great public ceremonial receptions which are the customary holidays of a Minister of State. 'Life,' said he, pensively, 'would be tolerably agreeable if it were not for its amusements.' He spoke of those 'brilliant excitements,' as you call them, which form the amusements of capitals. He would not have spoken so of the delight which Man can extract from a holiday with Nature. But tell me, you who have played so considerable a part in the world of fashion, do you prefer the drawing-rooms of London to the log-house by the lake?"

"Why," said Lady Gertrude, honestly, and with a half-sigh, "I own I should be glad if Percival would consent to spend six months in the year, or even three, in London. However, what he likes I like. Providence has made us women of very pliable materials."

"Has it?" said I; "that information is new to me — one lives to learn." And here, as the pony stopped at the porch, I descended to offer my arm to the amiable charioteer.

Nothing worth recording took place the rest of the evening. Henry and the Painter played at billiards, Lady Gertrude and the Librarian at backgammon. Clara went into the billiard-room, seating herself there with her work: by some fond instinct of her loving nature, she felt as if she ought not to waste the min-

Digitized by Google

utes yet vouchsafed to her — she was still with him who was all in all to her!

I took down 'The Faithful Shepherdess,' wishing to refresh my memory of passages which the scenes we had visited that day vaguely recalled to my mind. Looking over my shoulder, Percival guided me to the lines I was hunting after. This led to comparisons between 'The Faithful Shepherdess' and the 'Comus,' and thence to that startling contrast in the way of viewing, and in the mode of describing, rural nature, between the earlier English poets and those whom Dryden formed upon Gallic models, and so on into the pleasant clueless labyrinth of metaphysical criticism on the art of poetic genius. When we had parted for the night, and I regained my own room, I opened my window and looked forth on the moonlit gardens. A few minutes later, a shadow, moving slow, passed over the silvered ground, and, descending the terrace stairs, vanished among the breathless shrubs and slumbering flowers. I recognised the man who loved to make night his companion.

The next day the atmosphere was much cooler, refreshed by a heavy shower that had fallen at dawn; and when, not long after noon, Percival and I, mounted on ponies bred in the neighbouring forests, were riding through the narrow lanes towards the house we had agreed to visit, we did not feel the heat oppressive. It was a long excursion; we rode slowly, and the distance was about sixteen miles.

We arrived at last at a little hamlet remote from the highroads. The cottages, though old-fashioned, were singularly neat and trim — flower-plots before

Digitized by Google

them, and small gardens for kitchen use behind. A very ancient church, with its parsonage, backed the broad village-green; and opposite the green stood one of those small quaint manor-houses which satisfied the pride of our squires two hundred years ago. On a wide garden-lawn in front were old yew-trees cut into fantastic figures of pyramids and obelisks and birds and animals; beyond the lawn, on a levelled platform immediately before the house, was a small garden, with a sundial, and a summer-house or pavilion of the date of William III., when buildings of that kind, for a short time, became the fashionable appendage to country-houses, frequently decorated inside with musical trophies, as if built for a music-room; but, I suspect, more generally devoted to wine and pipes by the host and his male friends. At the rear of the house stretched an ample range of farm-buildings in very good repair and order, the whole situated on the side of a hill, sufficiently high to command an extensive prospect, bounded at the farthest distance by the sea, yet not so high as to lose the screen of hills, crested by young plantations of fir and larch; while the midmost slopes were, in part, still abandoned to sheepwalks; in part, brought (evidently of late) into cultivation; and farther down, amid the richer pastures that dipped into the valley, goodly herds of cattle indolently grazed or drowsily reposed.

We dismounted at the white garden-gate. A man ran out from the farmyard and took our ponies; evidently a familiar acquaintance of Tracey's, for he said heartily, "that he was glad to see his honour looking so well," and volunteered a promise that the ponies should be well rubbed down, and fed. "Master was

Digitized by Google

at home; we should find him in the orchard swinging Miss Lucy."

So, instead of entering the house, Tracey, who knew all its ways, took me round to the other side, and we came into one of those venerable orchards which carry the thought back to the early day when the orchard was, in truth, the garden.

A child's musical laugh guided us through the lines of heavy-laden apple-trees to the spot where the once famous prizeman — the once brilliant political thinker — was now content to gratify the instinctive desire *tentare aërias vias* — in the pastime of an infant.

He was so absorbed in his occupation that he did not hear or observe us till we were close at his side. Then, after carefully arresting the swing, and tenderly taking out the little girl, he shook hands with Percival; and when the ceremony of mutual introduction was briefly concluded, extended the same courtesy to myself.

Gray was a man in the full force of middle life, with a complexion that seemed to have been originally fair and delicate, but had become bronzed and hardened by habitual exposure to morning breezes and noonday suns. He had a clear, bright blue eye, and a countenance that only failed of being handsome by that length and straightness of line between nostril and upper lip, which is said by physiognomists to be significant of firmness and decision. The whole expression of his face, though frank and manly, was, however, rather sweet than harsh; and he had one of those rare voices which almost in themselves secure success to a public speaker — distinct and clear, even in its lowest tone, as a silvery bell.

Digitized by Google

I think much of a man's nature is shown by the way in which he shakes hands. I doubt if any worldly student of Chesterfieldian manners can ever acquire the art of that everyday salutation, if it be not inborn in the kindness, loyalty, and warmth of his native disposition. I have known many a great man who lays himself out to be popular, who can school his smile to fascinating sweetness, his voice to persuasive melody, but who chills or steels your heart against him the moment he shakes hands with you.

But there is a cordial clasp which shows warmth of impulse, unhesitating truth, and even power of character — a clasp wich recalls the classic trust in the "faith of the right hand."

And the clasp of Hastings Gray's hand at once propitiated me in his favour. While he and I exchanged the few words with which acquaintance commences, Percival had replaced Miss Lucy in the swing, and had taken the father's post. Lucy, before disappointed at the cessation of her amusement, felt now that she was receiving a compliment, which she must not abuse too far; so she very soon, of her own accord, unselfishly asked to be let down, and we all walked back towards the house.

"You will dine with us, I hope," said Gray. "I know when you come at this hour, Sir Percival, that you always meditate giving us that pleasure." (Turning to me,) "It is now half-past three; we dine at four o'clock, and that early hour gives you time to rest, and ride back in the cool of the evening."

"My dear Gray," answered Percival, "I accept your invitation for myself and my friend. I foresaw

Digitized by Google

you would ask us, and left word at home that we were not to be waited for. Where is Mrs. Gray?"

"I suspect that she is about some of those household matters which interest a farmer's wife. Lucy, run and tell your mamma that these gentlemen will dine with us."

Lucy scampered off.

"The fact is," said Tracey, "that we have a problem to submit to you. You know how frequently I come to you for a hint when something puzzles me. But we can defer that knotty subject till we adjourn, as usual, to wine and fruit in your summer-house. Your eldest boy is at home for the holidays?"

"Not at home, though it is his holidays. He is now fifteen, and he and a school friend of his are travelling on foot into Cornwall. Nothing, I think, fits boys better for life than those hardy excursions in which they must depend on themselves, shift for themselves, think for themselves."

"I daresay you are right," said Tracey; "the earlier each of us human beings forms himself into an individual God's creature, distinct from the *servum pecus*, the better chance he has of acquiring originality of mind and dignity of character. And your other children?"

"Oh, my two younger boys I teach at home, and one little girl — I play with." Here addressing me, Gray asked "If I farmed?"

"Yes," said I, "but very much as *les Rois Fainéants* reigned. My bailiff is my *Maire du Palais*. I hope, therefore, that our friend Sir Percival will not wound my feelings as a lover of Nature by accusing me of wooing her for the sake of her turnips."

Digitized by Google

"Ah!" said Gray, smiling, "Sir Percival, I know, holds to the doctrine that the only pure love of Nature is the æsthetic; and looks upon the intimate connection which the husbandman forms with her as a cold-blooded *mariage de convenance*."

"I confess," answered Percival, "that I agree with the great German philosopher, that the love of Nature is pure in proportion as the delight in her companionship is unmixed with any idea of the gain she can give us. But a pure love may be a very sterile affection; and a *mariage de convenance* may be prolific in very fine offspring. I concede to you, therefore, that the world is bettered by the practical uses to which Nature has been put by those who wooed her for the sake of her dower: and I no more commend to the imitation of others my abstract æsthetic affection for her abstract æsthetic beauty; than I would commend Petrarch's poetical passion for Laura to the general adoption of lovers. I give you, then, gentlemen farmers, full permission to woo Nature for the sake of her turnips. Our mutton is all the better for it."

"And that is no small consideration," said Gray. "If I had gazed on my sheepwalks with the divine æsthetic eye, and without one forethought of the profit they might bring me, I should not already have converted 200 out of the 1000 acres I possess into land that would let at 30s. per acre, where formerly it let at 5s. But, with all submission to the great German philosopher, I don't think I love Nature the less because of the benefits with which she repays the pains I have taken to conciliate her favour. If, thanks to her, I can give a better education to my boys, and secure a modest provision for my girl, is it the pro-

Digitized by Google

perty of gratitude to destroy or to increase affection? But you see, sir, there is this difference between Sir Percival and myself: — He has had no motive in improving Nature for her positive uses, and therefore he has been contented with giving her a prettier robe. He loves her as a *grand seigneur* loves his mistress. I love her as a man loves the helpmate who assists his toils. According as in rural life my mind could find not repose, but occupation — according as that occupation was compatible with such prudent regard to fortune as a man owes to the children he brings into the world — my choice of life would be a right or a wrong one. In short, I find in the cultivation of Nature my business as well as my pleasure. I have a motive for the business which does not diminish my taste for the pleasure."

Tracey and I exchanged looks. So, then, here was a motive for activity. But why was the motive towards activity in pursuits requiring so little of the intellect for which Gray had been characterised, and so little of the knowledge which his youth had acquired, so much stronger than the motive towards a career which proffered an incalculably larger scope for his powers? Here, there was no want of energy — here, there had been no philosophical disdain of ambition — here, no great wealth leaving no stimulant to desires — no niggard poverty paralysing the sinews of hope. The choice of retirement had been made in the full vigour of a life trained from boyhood to the exercises that discipline the wrestlers for renown.

While I was thus musing, Gray led the way towards the farmyard, and on reaching it said to me, —

Digitized by Google

"Since you do farm, if only by deputy, I must show you the sheep with which I hope to win the first prize at our agricultural show in September."

"So you still care for prizes?" said I: "the love of fame is not dead within your breast."

"Certainly not; 'Pride attends us still.' I am very proud of the prizes I have already won; last year for my wurzel — the year before, for the cow I bred on my own pastures."

We crossed the farmyard, and arrived at the covered sheep-pens. I thought I had never seen finer sheep than those which Gray showed me with visible triumph. Then we two conversed with much animation upon the pros and cons in favour of stall-feeding *versus* free grazing, while Tracey amused himself, first in trying to conciliate a great dog, luckily for him chained up in the adjoining yard, and next, in favouring the escape of a mouse who had incautiously quitted the barn, and ventured within reach of a motherly hen, who seemed to regard it as a monster intent on her chicks.

Reaching the house, Gray conducted us up a flight of oak stairs — picturesque in its homely old-fashioned way — with wide landing-place, adorned by a blue china jar, filled with *pot-pourri*, and by a tall clock (one of Tompion's, now rare), in walnut-wood case; consigning us each to a separate chamber, to refresh ourselves by those simple ablutions with which, even in rustic retirements, civilised Englishmen preface the hospitable rites of Ceres and Bacchus.

The room in which I found myself was one of those never seen out of England, and only there in unpretending country-houses which have escaped the

Digitized by Google

innovating tastes of fashion. A bedstead of the time of George I., with mahogany fluted columns and panels at the bedhead, dark and polished, decorated by huge watch-pockets of some great-grandmother's embroidery, white spotless curtains, the walls in panel, and covered in part with framed engravings a century old; a large high screen, separating the wash-stand from the rest of the room, made lively by old caricatures and prints, doubtless the handiwork of female hands long stilled. A sweet, not strong, odour of dried lavender escaped from a chest of drawers polished as bright as the bedstead. The small lattice-paned window opened to the fresh air, the woodbine framing it all round from without; amongst the woodbine the low hum of bees. A room for early sleep and cheerful rising with the eastern sun, which the window faced.

Tracey came into my room while I was still looking out of the casement, gazing on the little garden-plot without, bright with stocks and pinks and heartsease, and said, "Well, you see £600 a-year can suffice to arrest a clever man's ambition."

"I suspect," answered I, "that the ambition is not arrested, but turned aside to the object of doubling the £600 a-year. Neither ambition nor the desire of gain is dead in that farmyard."

"We shall cross-question our host after dinner," answered Tracey; "meanwhile let me conduct you to the dining-room. A pretty place this, in its way, is it not?"

"Very," said I, with enthusiasm. "Could you not live as happily here as in your own brilliant villa?"

"No, not quite, but still happily."

"Why not quite?"

Digitized by Google

"First, because there is nothing within or without the house which one could attempt to improve, unless by destroying the whole character of what is so good in its way; secondly, where could I put my Claudes and Turners? where my statues? where, oh where, my books? where, in short, the furniture of Man's mind?"

I made no answer, for the dinner-bell rang loud, and we went down at once into the dining-room — a quaint room, scarcely touched since the date of William III. A high and heavy dado of dark oak, the rest of the walls in Dutch stamped leather, still bright and fresh; a high mantelpiece, also of oak, with a very indifferent picture of still life let into the upper panel; arched recesses on either side, receptacles for china and tall drinking-glasses; heavy chairs, with crests inlaid on their ponderous backs, and faded needlework on their ample seats; — all, however, speaking of comfort and home, and solid though unassuming prosperity. Gray had changed his rude morning-dress, and introduced me to his wife with an evident husbandlike pride. Mrs. Gray was still very pretty; in her youth she must have been prettier even than Clara Thornhill, and, though very plainly dressed, still it was the dress of a gentlewoman. There was intelligence, but soft timid intelligence, in her dark hazel eyes and broad candid forehead. I soon saw, however, that she was painfully shy, and not at all willing to take her share in the expense of conversation. But with Tracey she was more at her ease than with a stranger, and I thanked him inwardly for coming to my relief as I was vainly endeavouring to extract from her lips more than a murmured monosyllable.

Digitized by Google

The dinner, however, passed off very pleasantly. Simple old English fare — plenty of it — excellent of its kind. Tracey was the chief talker, and made himself so entertaining, that at last even Mrs. Gray's shyness wore away, and I discovered that she had a well-informed graceful mind, constitutionally cheerful, as was evidenced by the blithe music of her low but happy laugh.

The dinner over, we adjourned, as Percival had proposed, to the summer-house. There we found the table spread with fruits and wine, of which last the port was superb; no better could be dragged from the bins of a college, or blush on the board of a prelate. Mrs. Gray, however, deserted us, but we now and then caught sight of her in the garden without, playing gaily with her children — two fine little boys, and Lucy, who seemed to have her own way with them all, as she ought — the youngest child, the only girl — justifiably papa's pet, for she was the child most like her mother.

"Gray," said Tracey, "my friend and I have had some philosophical disputes, which we cannot decide to our own satisfaction, on the reasons why some men do so much more in life than other men, without having any apparent intellectual advantage over those who are contented to be obscure. We have both hit on a clue to the cause, in what we call motive power. But what this motive power really is, and why it should fail in some men and be so strong in others, is matter of perplexity, at least to me, and I fancy my friend himself is not much more enlightened therein than I am. So we have both come here to hear what you have to say — you, who certainly had motive

Digitized by Google

enough for ambitious purposes when you swept away so many academical prizes — when you rushed into speech and into print, and cast your bold eye on St. Stephen's. And now, what has become of that motive power? Is it all put into prizes for root-crops and sheep?"

"As to myself," answered Gray, passing the wine "I can give very clear explanations. I am of a gentleman's family, but the son of a very poor curate. Luckily for me, we lived close by an excellent grammar-school, at which I obtained a free admission. From the first day I entered, I knew that my poor father, bent on making me a scholar, counted on my exertions not only for my own livelihood, but for a provision for my mother should she survive him. Here was motive enough to supply motive power. I succeeded in competition with rivals at school, and success added to the strength of the motive power. Our county member, on whose estate I was born, took a kindly interest in me, and gave me leave, when I quitted school as head-boy, to come daily to his house and share the studies of his son, who was being prepared for the university by a private tutor, eminent as a scholar and admirable as a teacher. Thus I went up to college not only full of hope (in itself a motive power, though, of itself, an unsafe one), but of a hope so sustained that it became resolution, by the knowledge that to maintain me at the university my parents were almost literally starving themselves. This suffices to explain whatever energy and application I devoted to my academical career. At last I obtained my fellowship; the income of that I shared with my parents; but if I died before them the income would

Digitized by Google

die also — a fresh motive power towards a struggle for fortune in the Great World. I took up politics, I confess it very frankly, as a profession rather than a creed; it was the shortest road to fame, and, with prudence, perhaps to pecuniary competence. If I succeeded in Parliament, I might obtain a living for my father, or some public situation for myself not dependent on the fluctuations of party. A very high political ambition was denied me by the penury of circumstance. A man must have good means of his own who aspires to rank among party chiefs. I knew I was but a political adventurer, that I could only be so considered; and had it not been for my private motive power, I should have been ashamed of my public one. As it was, my scholarly pride was secretly chafed at the thought that I was carrying into the affairs of state the greed of trade. However, just as I was studying 'Hansard's Debates,' and preparing myself for Parliament, this estate of Oakden suddenly fell to my lot. You large proprietors will smile when I say that we had always regarded the Grays of Oakden Hall with venerating pride; they were the head of our branch of the clan. My father had seen this place in his boyhood; the remembrance of it dwelt on his mind as the unequivocal witness of his dignity as a gentleman born. He came from the same stock as the Grays of Oakden, who had lived on the land for more than three centuries, entitled to call themselves squires. The relationship was very distant, still it existed. But a dream that so great a place as Oakden Hall, with its thousand acres, should ever pass to his son — no, my father thought it much more likely that his son might be prime minister! John Gray of Oakden had never

Digitized by Google

taken the least notice of us, except that, when I won the Pitt scholarship, he sent me a fine turkey, labelled 'From John Gray, Esq. of Oakden.' This present I acknowledged, but John Gray never answered my letter. Just at that time, however, as appears by the date, he remade his will, by which the succession to this property was secured to me in what must then have seemed the very improbable event of the death, without issue, of two nephews, both younger men than myself. That event, so improbable, happened. The elder nephew died, unmarried, of rheumatic fever, a few months before old Gray's decease; the other, two weeks after it: poor fellow! he was thrown from his horse, and killed on the spot. Thus I came into this property. Soon afterwards I married. The possession of land is a great tranquilliser to a restless spirit, and a happy marriage is a sedative as potent. Poverty is a spur to action. Great wealth, on the other hand, not unnaturally tends to the desire of display, and in free countries often to the rivalry for political power. The golden mean is proverbially the condition most favourable to content, and content is the antidote to ambition. Mine was the golden mean! Other influences of pride and affection contributed to keep me still. Of pride; for was I not really a greater man here, upon my ancestral acres, and my few yearly hundreds, than as a political aspirant, who must commence his career by being a political dependant? How rich I felt here! how poor I should be in London! How inevitably, in the daily expenses of a metropolitan life, and in the costs of elections (should I rise beyond being a mere nominee), I must become needy and involved! So much for the influence of pride.

Digitized by Google

Now for the influence of affection: my dear wife had never been out of these rural shades among which she was born. She is of a nature singularly timid, sensitive, and retiring. The idea of that society to which a political career would have led me terrified her. I loved her the better for desiring no companionship but mine. In fine, my desires halted at once on these turfs; the Attraction of the Earth prevailed; the motive power stopped here."

"You have never regretted your choice?" said Tracey.

"Certainly not; I congratulate myself on it more and more every year. For, after all, here I have ample occupation and a creditable career. I have improved my fortune, instead of wasting it. I have a fixed, acknowledged, instead of an unsettled, equivocal position. I am an authority on many rural subjects of interest besides those of husbandry. I am an active magistrate; and, as I know a little of the law, I am the habitual arbiter upon all the disputes in the neighbourhood. I employ here with satisfaction, and not without some dignity, the energies which, in the great world, would have bought any reputation I might have gained at the price of habitual pain and frequent mortification."

"Then," said I, "you do not think that a saying of Dr. Arnold's, which I quoted to Tracey as no less applicable to men than to boys, is altogether a true one — viz., that the difference between boys, as regards the power of acquiring distinction, is not so much in talent as in energy; you retain the energies that once raised you to public distinction, but you no longer apply them to the same object."

Digitized by Google

"I believe that Dr. Arnold, if he be quoted correctly, spoke only half the truth. One difference between boy and boy or man and man, no doubt, is energy; but for great achievements or fame there must be also application — viz., every energy concentred on one definite point, and disciplined to strain towards it by patient habit. My energy, such as it is, would not have brought my sheepwalks into profitable cultivation if the energy had not been accompanied with devoted application to the business. And it is astonishing how, when the energy is constantly applied towards one settled aim — astonishing, I say — how invention is kindled out of it. Thus, in many a quiet solitary morning's walk round my farm, some new idea, some hint of improvement or contrivance, occurs to me; this I ponder and meditate upon till it takes the shape of experiment. I presume that it is so with poet, artist, orator, or statesman. His mind is habituated to apply itself to definite subjects of observation and reflection, and out of this habitual musing thereon, involuntarily spring the happy originalities of thinking which are called his 'inspirations.'"

"One word more," said I. "Do you consider, then, that which makes a man devote himself to fame or ambition is a motive power of which he himself is conscious?"

"No; not always. I imagine that most men entering on some career are originally impelled towards it by a motive which, at the time, they seldom take the trouble to analyse or even to detect. They would at once see what that motive was if, early in the career, it were withdrawn. In a majority of cases it is the *res angusta*, yet not poverty in itself, but a poverty dis-

Digitized by Google

proportioned to the birth, or station, or tastes, or intellectual culture of the aspirant. Thus, the peasant or operative rarely feels in his poverty a motive power towards worldly distinction; but the younger son of a gentleman does feel that motive power. And hence a very large proportion of those who in various ways have gained fame, have been the cadets of a gentleman's family, or the sons of poor clergymen, sometimes of farmers and tradesmen, who have given them an education beyond the average of their class. Other motive powers towards fame have been sometimes in ambition, sometimes in love; sometimes in a great sorrow, from which a strong mind sought to wrest itself; sometimes even in things that would appear frivolous to a philosopher. I knew a young man, of no great talents, but of keen vanity and great resolution and force of character, who, as a child, had been impressed with envy of the red ribbon which his uncle wore as Knight of the Bath. From his infancy he determined some day or other to win a red ribbon for himself. He did so at last, and in trying to do so became famous.

"In great commercial communities a distinction is given to successful trade, so that the motive power of youthful talent nourished in such societies is mostly concentred on gain, not through avarice, but through the love of approbation or esteem. Thus, it is noticeable that our great manufacturing towns, where energy and application abound, have not contributed their proportionate quota of men distinguished in arts or sciences (except the mechanical), or polite letters, or the learned professions. In rural districts, on the contrary, the desire of gain is not associated with the desire of honour

Digitized by Google

and distinction, and therefore, in them, the youth early coveting fame strives for it in other channels than those of gain. But whatever the original motive power, if it has led to a continuous habit of the mind, and is not withdrawn before that habit becomes a second nature, the habit will continue after the motive power has either wholly ceased or become very faint, as the famous scribbling Spanish cardinal is said, in popular legends, to have continued to write on after he himself was dead. Thus, a man who has acquired the obstinate habit of labouring for the public originally from an enthusiastic estimate of the value of public applause, may, later, conceive a great contempt for the public, and, in sincere cynicism, become wholly indifferent to its praise or its censure, and yet, like Swift, go on as long as the brain can retain faithful impressions and perform its normal functions, writing for the public he so disdains. Thus many a statesman, wearied and worn, satisfied of the hollowness of political ambition, and no longer enjoying its rewards, sighing for retirement and repose, nevertheless continues to wear his harness. Habit has tyrannised over all his actions; break the habit, and the thread of his life snaps with it!

"Lastly, however, I am by no means sure that there is not in some few natures an inborn irresistible activity, a constitutional attraction between the one mind and the human species, which requires no special, separate motive power from without to set it into those movements which, per force, lead to fame. I mean those men to whom we at once accord the faculty which escapes all satisfactory metaphysical definition —INGENIUM; viz., the inborn spirit which we call genius.

Digitized by Google

"And in *these* natures, whatever the motive power that in the first instance urged them on, if at any stage, however early, that motive power be withdrawn, some other one will speedily replace it. Through them Providence mysteriously acts on the whole world, and their genius while on earth is one of Its most visible ministrants. But genius is the exceptional phenomenon in human nature; and in examining the ordinary laws that influence human minds we have no measurement and no scales for portents."

"There is, however," said Tracey, "one motive power towards careers of public utility which you have not mentioned, but the thought of which often haunts me in rebuke of my own inertness, — I mean, quite apart from any object of vanity or ambition, the sense of our own duty to mankind; and hence the devotion to public uses of whatever talents have been given to us — not to hide under a bushel."

"I do not think," answered Gray, "that when a man feels he is doing good in his own way he need reproach himself that he is not doing good in some other way to which he is not urged by special duty, and from which he is repelled by constitutional temperament. I do not, for instance, see that because you have a very large fortune you are morally obliged to keep correspondent establishments, and adopt a mode of life hostile to your tastes; you sufficiently discharge the duties of wealth if the fair proportion of your income go to objects of well-considered benevolence, and purposes not unproductive to the community. Nor can I think that I, who possess but a very moderate fortune, am morally called upon to strive for its increase in the many good speculations which

Digitized by Google

life in a capital may offer to an eager mind, provided always that I do nevertheless remember that I have children; to whose future provision and wellbeing some modest augmentations of my fortune would be desirable. In improving my land for their benefit, I may say also that I add, however trivially, to the wealth of the country. Let me hope that the trite saying is true, that 'he who makes two blades of corn grow where one grew before' is a benefactor to his race. So with mental wealth: surely it is permitted to us to invest and expend it within that sphere most suited to those idiosyncrasies, the adherence to which constitutes our moral health. I do not, with the philosopher, condemn the man who, irresistibly impelled towards the pursuit of honours and power, persuades himself that he is toiling for the public good when he is but gratifying his personal ambition; — probably he is a better man thus acting in conformity with his own nature, than he would be if placed beyond all temptation in Plato's cave. Nor, on the other hand, can I think that a man of the highest faculties and the largest attainments, who has arrived at a sincere disdain of power or honours, would be a better man if he were tyrannically forced to pursue the objects from which his temperament recoils, upon the plea that he was thus promoting the public welfare. No doubt, in every city, town, street, and lane, there are bustling, officious, restless persons, who thrust themselves into public concerns, with a loud declaration that they are animated only by the desire of public good; they mistake their fidgetiness for philanthropy. Not a bubble company can be started, but what it is with a programme that its direct object is

Digitized by Google

the public benefit, and the ten per cent promised to the shareholders is but secondary consideration. Who believes in the sincerity of that announcement? In fine, according both to religion and to philosophy, virtue is the highest end of man's endeavour; but virtue is wholly independent of the popular shout or the lictor's fasces. Virtue is the same, whether with or without the laurel crown, or the curule chair. Honours do not sully it, but obscurity does not degrade. He who is truthful, just, merciful, and kindly, does his duty to his race, and fulfils his great end in creation, no matter whether the rays of his life are not visibly beheld beyond the walls of his household, or whether they strike the ends of the earth; for every human soul is a world complete and integral, storing its own ultimate uses and destinies within itself; viewed only for a brief while, in its rising on the gaze of earth; pressing onward in its orbit amidst the infinite, when, snatched from our eyes, we say, 'It has passed away!' And as every star, however small it seem to us from the distance at which it shines, contributes to the health of our atmosphere, so every soul, pure and bright in itself, however far from our dwelling, however unremarked by our vision, contributes to the wellbeing of the social system in which it moves, and, in its privacy, is part and parcel of the public weal."

Shading my face with my hand, I remained some moments musing after Gray's voice had ceased. Then looking up, I saw so pleased and grateful a smile upon Percival Tracey's countenance, that I checked the reply by which I had intended to submit a view of the subject in discussion somewhat different from that which Gray had taken from the Portico of the Stoics.

Digitized by Google

Why should I attempt to mar whatever satisfaction Percival's reason or conscience had found in our host's argument? His tree of life was too firmly set for the bias of its stem to swerve in any new direction towards light and air. Let it continue to rejoice in such light and such air as was vouchsafed to the site on which it had taken root. Evening, too, now drew in, and we had a long ride before us. A little while after, we had bid adieu to Oakden Hall, and were once more threading our way through the green and solitary lanes.

We conversed but little for the first five or six miles. I was revolving what I had heard, and considering how each man's reasoning moulds itself into excuse or applause for the course of life which he adopts. Percival's mind was employed in other thoughts, as became clear when he thus spoke: —

"Do you think, my dear friend, that you could spare me a week or two longer? It would be a charity to me if you could, for I expect, after to-morrow, to lose my young artist, and, alas! also the Thornhills."

"How! The Thornhills? So soon!"

"I count on receiving to-morrow the formal announcement of Henry's promotion and exchange into the regiment he so desires to enter, with the orders to join it abroad at once. Clara, I know, will not stay here; she will be with her husband till he sails, and after his departure will take her abode with his widowed mother. I shall miss them much. But Thornhill feels that he is wasting his life here; and so — well — I have acted for the best. With respect to the artist, this morning I received a letter from my old friend

Digitized by Google

Lord ——. He is going into Italy next week; he wishes for some views of Italian scenery for a villa he has lately bought, and will take Bourke with him on my recommendation, leaving him ultimately at Rome. Lord ——'s friendship and countenance will be of immense advantage to the young painter, and obtain him many orders. I have to break it to Bourke this evening, and he will, no doubt, quit me to-morrow to take leave of his family. For myself, as I always feel somewhat melancholy in remaining on the same spot after friends depart from it, I propose going to Bellevue, where I have a small yacht. It is glorious weather for sea excursions. Come with me, my dear friend! The fresh breezes will do you good; and we shall have leisure for talk on all the subjects which both of us love to explore and guess at."

No proposition could be more alluring to me. My recent intercourse with Tracey had renewed all the affection and interest with which he had inspired my youth. My health and spirits had been already sensibly improved by my brief holiday, and an excursion at sea had been the special advice of my medical attendant. I hesitated a moment. Nothing called me back to London except public business, and, in that, I foresaw but the bare chance of a motion in Parliament which stood on the papers for the next day; but my letters had assured me that this motion was generally expected to be withdrawn or postponed.

So I accepted the invitation gladly, provided nothing unforeseen should interfere with it.

Pleased by my cordial assent, Tracey's talk now flowed forth with genial animation. He described his villa overhanging the sea, with its covered walks to

Digitized by Google

the solitary beach — the many objects of interest and landscapes of picturesque beauty within reach of easy rides, on days in which the yacht might not tempt us. I listened with the delight of a schoolboy, to whom some goodnatured kinsman paints the luxuries of a home at which he invites the schoolboy to spend the vacation.

By little and little, our conversation glided back to our young past, and thence to those dreams, nourished ever by the young; — love and romance, and home brightened by warmer beams than glow in the smile of sober friendship. How the talk took this direction I know not; perhaps by unconscious association, as the moon rose above the forest-hills, with the love-star by her side. And, thus conversing, Tracey for the first time alluded to that single passion which had vexed the smooth river of his life — and which, thanks to Lady Gertrude, was already, though vaguely, known to me.

"It was," said he, "just such a summer night as this, and, though in a foreign country, amid scenes of which these woodland hills remind me, that the world seemed to me to have changed into a Fairyland; and, looking into my heart, I said to myself, 'This, then, is — love.' And a little while after, on such a night, and under such a moon, and amid such hills and groves, the world seemed blighted into a desert — life to be evermore without hope or object; and, looking again into my heart, I said, 'This, then, is love denied!'"

"Alas!" answered I, "there are few men in whose lives there is not some secret memoir of an affection thwarted; but rarely indeed does an affection thwarted

Digitized by Google

leave a permanent influence on the after-destinies of a man's life. On that question I meditate an essay, which, if ever printed, I will send to you."

I said this, wishing to draw him on, and expecting him to contradict my assertion as to the enduring influence of a disappointed love. He mused a moment or so in silence, and then said, "Well, perhaps so; an unhappy love may not permanently affect our after-destinies, still it colours our after-thoughts. It is strange that throughout my long and various existence I should have seen only one woman whom I could have wooed as my wife — one woman in whose presence I felt as if I were born for her and she for me."

"May I ask you what was her peculiar charm in your eyes; or, if you permit me to ask, can you explain it?"

"No doubt," answered Tracey, "much must be ascribed to the character of her beauty, which realised the type I had formed to myself from boyhood of womanly loveliness in form and face, and much also to a mind with which a man, however cultivated, could hold equal commune. But to me her predominating attraction was in a simple, unassuming nobleness of sentiment — a truthful, loyal, devoted, self-sacrificing nature. In her society I felt myself purified, exalted, as if in the presence of an angel. But enough of this. I am resigned to my loss, and have long since hung my votive tablet in the shrine of 'Time the Consoler.'"

"Forgive me if I am intrusive; but did she know that you loved her?"

"I cannot say; probably most women discover if

Digitized by Google

they are loved; but I rejoice to think that I never told her so."

"Would she have rejected you if you had?"

"Yes, unhesitatingly; her word was plighted to another. And though she would not, for the man to whom she had betrothed herself, have left her father alone in poverty and exile, she would never have married any one else."

"You believe, then, that she loved your rival with a heart that could not change?"

Tracey did not immediately reply. At last he said, "I believe this — that when scarcely out of girlhood, she considered herself engaged to be one man's wife, or for ever single. And if, in the course of time, and in length of absence, she could have detected in her heart the growth of a single thought unfaithful to her troth, she would have plucked it forth and cast it from her as firmly as if already a wedded wife, with her husband's honour in her charge. She was one of those women with whom man's trust is for ever safe, and to whom a love at variance with plighted troth is an impossibility. So, she lives in my thoughts still, as I saw her last, five-and-twenty years ago, unalterable in her youth and beauty. And I have been as true to her hallowed remembrance as she was true to her maiden vows. May I never see her again on earth! Her or her likeness I may find amid the stars. No," he added, in a lighter and cheerier tone — "no; I do not think that my actual destinies, my ways of life here below, have been affected by her loss. Had I won her, I can scarcely conceive that I should have become more tempted to ambition or less enamoured of home. Still, whatever leaves so deep a furrow in a

Digitized by Google

man's heart cannot be meant in vain. Where the ploughshare cuts, there the seed is sown, and there later the corn will spring. In a word, I believe that everything of moment which befalls us in this life — which occasions us some great sorrow — for which, in this life, we see not the uses — has, nevertheless, its definite object, and that that object will be visible on the other side of the grave. It may seem but a barren grief in the history of a life — it may prove a fruitful joy in the history of a soul. For if nothing in this world is accident, surely all that which affects the only creature upon earth to whom immortality is announced, must have a distinct and definite purpose, often not developed till immortality begins."

Here we had entered on the wide spaces of the park. The deer and the kine were asleep on the silvered grass, or under the shade of the quiet trees. Now, as we cleared a beech-grove, we saw the lights gleaming from the windows of the house, and the moon, at her full, resting still over the peaceful housetop! Truly had Percival said, "That there are trains of thought set in motion by the stars which are dormant in the glare of the sun" — truly had he said, too, "That without such thoughts man's thinking is incomplete."

We gained the house, and, entering the library, it was pleasant to see how instinctively all rose to gather round the master. They had missed Percival's bright presence the whole day.

Some little time afterwards, when, seated next to Lady Gertrude, I was talking to her of the Grays, I observed Tracey take aside the Painter, and retire with him into the adjoining colonnade. They were

Digitized by Google

not long absent. When they returned, Bourke's face, usually serious, was joyous and elated. In a few moments, with all his Irish warmth of heart, he burst forth with the announcement of the new obligations he owed to Sir Percival Tracey. "I have always said," exclaimed he, "that, give me an opening and I will find or make my way. I have the opening now; you shall see!" We all poured our congratulations upon the young enthusiast, except Henry Thornhill, and his brow was shaded and his lip quivered. Clara, watching him, curbed her own friendly words to the artist, and, drawing to her husband's side, placed her hand tenderly on his shoulder. "Pish! do leave me alone," muttered the ungracious churl.

"See," whispered Percival to me, "what a brute that fine young fellow would become if we insisted on making him happy our own way, and saving him from the chance of being shot!"

Therewith rising, he gently led away Clara, to whose soft eyes tears had rushed; and, looking back to Henry, whose head was bended over a volume of 'The Wellington Despatches,' said in his ear, half-fondly, half-reproachfully, "Poor young fool! how bitterly you will repent every word, every look of unkindness to her, when — when she is no more at your side to pardon you!"

That night it was long before I slept. I pleased myself with what is now grown to me a rare amusement — viz, the laying out plans for the morrow. This holiday, with Tracey all to myself; this summer sail on the seas; this interval of golden idlesse, refined by intercourse with so serene an intelligence, and on subjects so little broached in the world of cities, fascinated

Digitized by Google

my imagination; and I revolved a hundred questions it would be delightful to raise, a hundred problems it would be impossible to solve. Though my life has been a busy one, I believe that constitutionally I am one of the most indolent men alive. To lie on the grass in summer noons under breathless trees, to glide over smooth waters, and watch the still shadows on tranquil shores, is happiness to me. I need then no books — then, no companion. But if to that happiness in the mere luxury of repose, I may add another happiness of a higher nature, it is in converse with some one friend, upon subjects remote from the practical work-day world, — subjects akin less to our active thoughts than to our dream-like reveries, — subjects conjectural, speculative, fantastic, embracing not positive opinions — for opinions are things combative and disputatious — but rather those queries and guesses which start up from the farthest border-land of our reason, and lose themselves in air as we attempt to chase and seize them.

And perhaps this sort of talk, which leads to no conclusions clear enough for the uses of wisdom, is the more alluring to me, because it is very seldom to be indulged. I carefully separate from the business of life all which belong to the visionary realm of speculative conjecture. From the world of action I hold it imperatively safe to banish the ideas which exhibit the cloudland of metaphysical doubts and mystical beliefs. In the actual world let me see by the same broad sun that gives light to all men; it is only in the world of reverie that I amuse myself with the sport of the dark lantern, letting its ray shoot before me into the gloom, and caring not if, in its illusive light, the thorn-tree in

Digitized by Google

my path take the aspect of a ghost. I shall notice the thorn-tree all the better, distinguish more clearly its shape, when I pass by it the next day under the sun, for the impression it made on my fancy seen first by the gleam of the dark lantern. Now, Tracey is one of the very few highly-educated men it has been my lot to know, with whom one can safely mount in rudderless balloons, drifting wind-tossed after those ideas which are the phantoms of Reverie, and wander, ghost-like, out of castles in the air. And my mind found a playfellow in his, where, in other men's minds, as richly cultured, it found only companions or competitors in task-work.

Towards dawn, I fell asleep, and dreamt that I was a child once more, gathering bluebells and chasing dragonflies amid murmuring water-reeds. The next day I came down late; all had done breakfast. The Painter was already gone; the Librarian had retired into his den. Henry Thornhill was walking by himself to and fro, in front of the window, with folded arms and downcast brow. Percival was seated apart writing letters. Clara was at work, stealing every now and then a mournful glance towards Henry. Lady Gertrude, punctiliously keeping her place by the tea-urn, filled my cup, and pointed to a heap of letters formidably ranged before my plate. I glanced anxiously and rapidly over these unwelcomed epistles. Thank heaven, nothing to take me back to London! My political correspondent informed me, by a hasty line, that the dreaded motion which stood first on the parliamentary paper for that day would in all probability be postponed, agreeably to the request of the Government. The mover of it had not, however, given a

Digitized by Google

positive answer; he would do so in the course of the night (last night); and there was little doubt that, as a professed supporter of the Government, he would yield to the request that had been made to him.

So, after I had finished my abstemious breakfast, I took Percival aside and told him that I considered myself free to prolong my stay, and asked him, in a whisper, if he had yet received the official letter he expected, announcing young Thornhill's exchange and promotion.

"Yes," said he, "and I only waited for you to announce its contents to poor Henry; for I wish you to tell me whether you think the news will make him as happy as yesterday he thought it would."

Tracey and I then went out, and joined Henry in his walk. The young man turned round on us an impatient countenance.

"So we have lost Bourke," said Tracey. "I hope he will return to England with the reputation he goes forth to seek."

"Ay," said Henry, "Bourke is a lucky dog to have found, in one who is not related to him, so warm and so true a friend."

"Every dog, lucky or unlucky, has his day," said Percival, gravely.

"Every dog except a house-dog," returned Henry. "A house-dog is thought only fit for a chain and a kennel."

"'Ah, happy if his happiness he knew!'" replied Tracey. "But I own that liberty compensates for the loss of a warm litter and a good dinner. Away from the kennel and off with the chain! Read this letter, and accept my congratulations — *Major* Thornhill!"

Digitized by Google

The young man started; the colour rushed to his cheeks; he glanced hastily over the letter held out to him; dropped it; caught his kinsman's hand, and, pressing it to his heart, exclaimed, "Oh, sir, thanks, thanks! So then, all the while I was accusing you of obstructing my career you were quietly promoting it. How can you forgive me my petulance, my ingratitude?"

"Tut," said Percival, kindly, "the best-tempered man is sometimes cross in his cups; and nothing, perhaps, more irritates a young brain than to get drunk on the love of glory."

At the word glory the soldier's crest rose, his eye flashed fire, his whole aspect changed, it became lofty and noble. Suddenly his eye caught sight of Clara, who had stepped out of the window, and stood gazing on him. His head dropped, tears rushed to his eyes, and with a quivering, broken voice, he muttered, "Poor Clara — my wife, my darling! Oh, Sir Percival, truly you said how bitterly I should repent every unkind word and look. Ah, they will haunt me!"

"Put aside regrets now. Go and break the news to your wife: support, comfort her; you alone can. I have not dared to tell her."

Henry sighed, and went, no longer joyous, but with slow step and paling cheek, to the place where Clara stood. We saw him bend over the hand she held out to him, kiss it humbly, and then, passing his arm round her waist, he drew her away into the farther recesses of the garden, and both disappeared from our eyes.

"No," said I, "he is not happy; like us all, he finds

Digitized by Google

that things coveted have no longer the same charm when they are things possessed. Clara is avenged already. But you have done wisely. Let him succeed or let him fail, you have removed from Clara her only rival. If you had debarred him from honour, you would have estranged him from love. Now you have bound him to Clara for life. She has ceased to be an obstacle to his dreams, and henceforth she herself will be the dream which his waking life will sigh to regain."

"Heaven grant he may come back with both his legs and both his arms; and, perhaps, with a bit of ribbon or five shillings' worth of silver on his breast!" said Percival, trying hard to be lively. "Of all my kinsmen, I think I like him the best. He is rough as the east wind, but honest as the day. Heigho! they will both leave us in an hour or two. Clara's voice is so sweet; I wonder when she will sing again! What a blank the place will seem without those two young faces! As soon as they are gone, we two will be off. Aunt Gertrude does not like Bellevue, and will pay a visit for a few days to a cousin of hers on the other side of the county. I must send on before to let the housekeeper at Bellevue prepare for our coming. Meanwhile, pardon me if I leave you — perhaps you have letters to write; if so, despatch them."

I was in no humour for writing letters, but when Percival left me I strolled from the house into the garden, and, reclining there on a bench opposite one of the fountains, enjoyed the calm beauty of the summer morning. Time slipped by. Every now and then I caught sight of Henry and Clara among the lilacs in one of the distant walks, his arm still round her waist,

Digitized by Google

her head leaning on his shoulder. At length they went into the house, doubtless to prepare for their departure.

I thought of the wild folly with which youth casts away the substance of happiness to seize at the shadow which breaks on the wave that mirrors it; wiser and happier surely the tranquil choice of Gray, though with gifts and faculties far beyond those of the young man who mistook the desire of fame for the power to win it. And then my thoughts settling back on myself, I became conscious of a certain melancholy. How poor and niggard compared with my early hopes had been my ultimate results! How questioned, grudged, and litigated, my right of title to every inch of ground that my thought had discovered or my toils had cultivated! What motive power in me had, from boyhood to the verge of age, urged me on "to scorn delight and love laborious days"? Whatever the motive power once had been, I could no longer trace it. If vanity — of which, doubtless, in youth I had my human share — I had long since grown rather too callous than too sensitive to that love of approbation in which vanity consists. I was stung by no penury of fortune, influenced by no feverish thirst for a name that should outlive my grave, fooled by no hope of the rewards which goad on ambition. I had reached the age when Hope weighs her anchor and steers forth so far that her amplest sail seems but a silvery speck on the last line of the horizon. Certainly I flattered myself that my purposes linked my toils to some slight service to mankind; that in graver efforts I was asserting opinions in the value of which to human interests I sincerely believed, and in lighter aims venting thoughts and releasing

Digitized by Google

fancies which might add to the culture of the world — not, indeed, fruitful harvests, but at least some lowly flowers. But though such intent might be within my mind, could I tell how far I unconsciously exaggerated its earnestness? — still less could I tell how far the intent was dignified by success. "Have I done aught for which mankind would be the worse were it swept into nothingness to-morrow?" — is a question which many a grand and fertile genius may, in its true humility, address mournfully to itself. It is but a negative praise, though it has been recorded as a high one, to leave

"No line which, dying, we would wish to blot."

If that be all, as well leave no line at all. He has written in vain who does not bequeath lines that, if blotted, would be a loss to that treasure-house of mind which is the everlasting possession of the world. Who, yet living, can even presume to guess if he shall do this? Not till at least a century after his brain and his hand are dust can even critics begin to form a rational conjecture of an author's or a statesman's uses to his kind. Was it, then, as Gray had implied, merely the force of habit which kept me in movement? if so, was it a habit worth all the sacrifice it cost? Thus meditating, I forgot that if all men reasoned thus and acted according to such reasoning, the earth would have no intermediate human dwellers between the hewers and diggers, and the idlers, born to consume the fruits which they do not plant. Farewell, then, to all the embellishments and splendours by which civilised man breathes his mind and his soul into nature. For it is not only the genius of rarest intellects which adorns

Digitized by Google

and aggrandises social states, but the aspirations and the efforts of thousands and millions, all towards the advance and uplifting and beautifying of the integral, universal state, by the energies native to each. Where would be the world fit for Traceys and Grays to dwell in, if all men philosophised like the Traceys and the Grays? Where all the gracious arts, all the generous rivalries of mind, that deck and animate the bright calm of peace? Where all the devotion, heroism, self-sacrifice in a common cause, that exalt humanity even amidst the rage and deformities of war, if, throughout well-ordered, close-welded states, there ran not electrically, from breast to breast, that love of honour which is a part of man's sense of beauty, or that instinct towards utility which, even more than the genius too exceptional to be classed among the normal regulations of social law, creates the marvels of mortal progress? Not, however, I say, did I then address to myself these healthful and manly questions. I felt only that I repined, and looked with mournful and wearied eyes along an agitated, painful, laborious past. Rousing myself with an effort from these embittered contemplations, the charm of the external nature insensibly refreshed and gladdened me. I inhaled the balm of an air sweet with flowers, felt the joy of the summer sun, from which all life around seemed drawing visible happiness, and said to myself gaily, "At least to-day is mine — this blissful sunlit day —

> 'Nimium breves
> Flores amœnæ ferre jube rosæ,
> Dum res et ætas et sororum,
> Fila trium patiuntur atra!'"

So murmuring, I rose as from a dream, and saw before

Digitized by Google

me a strange figure — a figure, uncouth, sinister, ominous as the evil genius that startled Brutus on the eve of Philippi. I knew by an unmistakable instinct that that figure *was* an evil genius.

"Do you want me? Who and what are you?" I asked, falteringly.

"Please your honour, I come express from the N— Station. A telegram."

I opened the scrap of paper extended to me, and read these words, —

"O— positively brings on his motion. Announced it last night too late for post. Division certain — probably before dinner. Every vote wanted. Come directly."

Said the Express with a cruel glee, as I dropped the paper, "Sir, the station-master also received a telegram to send over a fly. I have brought one; only just in time to catch the half-past twelve o'clock; no other train till six. You had best be quick, sir."

No help for it. I hurried back to the house, bade my servant follow by the next train with my portmanteau — no moments left to wait for packing; found Tracey in his quiet study — put the telegram into his hands. "You see my excuse — adieu!"

"Does this motion, then, interest you so much? Do you mean to speak on it?"

"No, but it must not be carried. Every vote against it is of consequence. Besides, I have promised to vote, and cannot stay away with honour."

"Honour! That settles it. I must go to Bellevue alone; or shall I take Caleb and make him teach me Hebrew? But surely you will join me to-morrow, or the next day?"

Digitized by Google

"Yes, if I can. But heavens!" (glancing at the clock) — "not half an hour to reach the station — six miles off. Kindest regards to Lady Gertrude — poor Clara — Henry — and all. Heaven bless you!"

I am in the fly — I am off. I gain the station just in time for the train — arrive at the House of Commons in more than time as to a vote, for the debate not only lasted all that night, but was adjourned till the next week, and lasted the greater part of that, when it was withdrawn, and — no vote at all!

But I could not then return to Tracey. Every man accustomed to business in London knows how, once there, hour after hour, arises a something that will not allow him to depart. When at length freed, I knew Tracey would no longer need my companionship — his Swedish philosopher was then with him. They were deep in scientific mysteries, on which, as I could throw no light, I should be but a profane intruder. Besides, I was then summoned to my own country place, and had there to receive my own guests, long pre-engaged. So passed the rest of the summer; in the autumn I went abroad, and have never visited the Castle of Indolence since those golden days. In truth I resisted a frequent and a haunting desire to do so. I felt that a second and a longer sojourn in that serene but relaxing atmosphere might unnerve me for the work which I had imposed on myself, and sought to persuade my tempted conscience was an inexorable duty. Experience had taught me that in the sight of that intellectual repose, so calm and so dreamily happy, my mind became unsettled, and nourished seeds that might ripen to discontent of the lot I had chosen for myself. So then, *sicut meus est mos*, I seized a consolation for the

Digitized by Google

loss of enjoyments that I may not act anew, by living them over again in fancy and remembrance: I give to my record the title of "Motive Power," though it contains much episodical to that thesis, and though it rather sports around the subject so indicated than subjects it to strict analysis. But I here take for myself the excuse I have elsewhere made for Montaigne, in his loose observance of the connection between the matter and the titles of his essays.

I must leave it to the reader to blame or acquit me for having admitted so many lengthy descriptions, so many digressive turns and shifts of thought and sentiment, through which, as through a labyrinth, he winds his way, with steps often checked and often retrogressive, still, sooner or later, creeping on to the heart of the maze. There I leave him to find the way out. Labyrinths have no interest if we give the clue to them.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

ESSAY XXIII.

ON CERTAIN PRINCIPLES OF ART IN WORKS OF IMAGINATION.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

ON CERTAIN PRINCIPLES OF ART IN WORKS OF IMAGINATION.

EVERY description of literature has its appropriate art. This truth is immediately acknowledged in works of imagination. We speak, in familiar phrase, of the Dramatic Art, or the Art of Poetry. But the presence of art is less generally recognised in works addressed to the reason. Nevertheless, art has its place in a treatise on political economy, or in a table of statistics. For in all subjects, however rigidly confined to abstract principles or positive facts, the principles and facts cannot be thrown together pell-mell; they require an artistic arrangement. Expression itself is an art. So that even works of pure science cannot dispense with art, because they cannot dispense with expression. What is called method in Science is the art by which Science makes itself intelligible. There is exquisite art in the arrangement of a problem in Euclid. If a man have a general knowledge of the fact that all lines drawn from the centre of a circle to the circumference are equal, but has never read the Third Book of Euclid, let him attempt to show, in his own way, that lines equally distant from the centre are equal to one another, and then compare his attempt with Euclid's theorem (Book III. Prop. 14), and he will at once acknowledge the master's art of demonstration. Pascal

Digitized by Google

is said to have divined, by the force of his own genius, so large a number of Euclid's propositions, as to appear almost miraculous to his admirers, and wholly incredible to his aspersers. Yet that number did not exceed eighteen. In fact, art and science have their meeting-point in method.

And though Kant applies the word *genius* (*ingenium*) strictly to the cultivators of Art, refusing to extend it to the cultivators of Science, yet the more we examine the highest orders of intellect, whether devoted to science, to art, or even to action, the more clearly we shall observe the presence of a faculty common to all such orders of intellect, because essential to completion in each — a faculty which seems so far intuitive or innate (*ingenium*) that, though study and practice perfect it, they do not suffice to bestow — viz., the faculty of grouping into order and symmetrical form, ideas in themselves scattered and dissimilar. This is the faculty of Method; and though every one who possesses it is not necessarily a great man, yet every great man must possess it in a very superior degree, whether he be a poet, a philosopher, a statesman, a general; for every great man exhibits the talent of organisation or construction, whether it be in a poem, a philosophical system, a policy, or a strategy. And without method there is no organisation nor construction. But in art, method is less perceptible than in science, and in familiar language usually receives some other name. Nevertheless, we include the meaning when we speak of the composition of a picture, the arrangement of an oration, the plan of a poem. Art employing method for the symmetrical formation of beauty, as science employs it for the logical exposition of truth: but the

Digitized by Google

mechanical process is, in the last, ever kept visibly distinct; while, in the first, it escapes from sight amid the shows of colour and the curves of grace.

And though, as I have said, Art enters into all works, whether addressed to the reason or to the imagination, those addressed to the imagination are works of Art *par emphasis*, for they require much more than the elementary principles which Art has in common with Science. The two part company with each other almost as soon as they meet on that ground of Method which is common to both, — Science ever seeking, through all forms of the Ideal, to realise the Positive — Art, from all forms of the Positive, ever seeking to extract the ideal. The *beau ideal* is not in the reason — its only existence is in the imagination. To create in the reader's mind images which do not exist in the world, and leave them there, imperishable as the memories of friends with whom he has lived, and of scenes in which he has had his home, obviously necessitates a much ampler and much subtler Art than that which is required to make a positive fact clear to the comprehension. The highest quality of Art, as applied to literature, is therefore called "the Creative." Nor do I attach any importance to the cavil of some over-ingenious critics, who have denied that genius in reality *creates;* inasmuch as the forms it presents are only new combinations of ideas already existent. New combinations are, to all plain intents and purposes, creations. It is not in the power of man to create something out of nothing. And though the Deity no doubt can do so now — as those who acknowledge that the Divine Creator preceded all created things, must suppose that He did before there was even a Chaos —

Digitized by Google

yet, so far as it is vouchsafed to us to trace Him through Nature, all that we see in created Nature is combined out of what before existed. Art, therefore, may be said to create when it combines existent details into new wholes. No man can say that the watch which lies before me, or the table on which I write, were not created (that is, made) by the watch-maker or cabinetmaker, because the materials which compose a watch or a table have been on the earth, so far as we know of it, since the earth was a world fit for men to dwell in. Therefore, neither in Nature nor in Art can it be truly said that that power is not creative which brings into the world a new form, though all which compose a form, as all which compose a flower, a tree, a mite, an elephant, a man, are, if taken in detail, as old as the gases in the air we breathe, or the elements of the earth we tread. But the Creative Faculty in Art requires a higher power than it asks in Nature; for Nature may create things without life and mind — Nature may create dust and stones which have no other life and mind than are possessed by the animalcules that inhabit them. But the moment Art creates, it puts into its creations life and intellect; and it is only in proportion as the life thus bestowed endures beyond the life of man, and the intellect thus expressed exceeds that which millions of men can embody in one form, that we acknowledge a really great work of Art — that we say of the Artist, centuries after he is dead, "He was indeed a Poet," that is, a creator: He has created a form of life which the world did not know before, and breathed into that form a spirit which preserves it from the decay to which all of man himself except his soul is subjected. Achilles is killed

Digitized by Google

by Paris; Homer re-creates Achilles — and the Achilles of Homer is alive to-day.

By the common consent of all educated nations, the highest order of Art in Literature is Poetic Narrative, whether in the form of the Epic or that of the Drama. We are, therefore, compelled to allow that the objective faculty — which is the imperative essential of excellence in either of these two summits of the 'forked Parnassus' — attains to a sublimer reach of art than the subjective — that is, in order to make my scholastic adjectives familiar to common apprehension, the artist who reflects vividly and truthfully, in the impartial mirror of his mind, other circumstances, other lives, other characters than his own, belongs to a higher order than he who, subjecting all that he contemplates to his own idiosyncrasy, reflects but himself in his various images of nature and mankind. We admit this when we come to examples. We admit that Homer is of a higher order of art than Sappho; that Shakespeare's 'Macbeth' is of a higher order of art than Shakespeare's Sonnets; 'Macbeth' being purely objective — the Sonnets being perhaps the most subjective poems which the Elizabethan age can exhibit.

But it is not his choice of the highest order of art that makes a great artist. If one man says "I will write an epic," and writes but a mediocre epic, and another man says "I will write a song," and writes an admirable song — the man who writes what is admirable is superior to him who writes what is mediocre. There is no doubt that Horace is inferior to Homer — so inferior that we cannot apportion the difference. The one is epic, the other lyrical. But there is no doubt also that Horace is incalculably superior to Try-

Digitized by Google

phiodorus or Sir Richard Blackmore, though they are epical and he is lyrical. In a word, it is perfectly obvious, that in proportion to the height of the art attempted must be the powers of the artist, so that there is the requisite harmony between his subject and his genius; and that he who commands a signal success in one of the less elevated spheres of art must be considered a greater artist than he who obtains but indifferent success in the most arduous.

Nevertheless, Narrative necessitates so high a stretch of imagination, and so wide a range of intellect, that it will always obtain, if tolerably well told, a precedence of immediate popularity over the most exquisite productions of an inferior order of the solid and staple qualities of imagination — so much so that, even where the first has resort to what may be called the brick and mortar of prose, as compared with the ivory, marble, and cedar of verse, a really great work of Narrative in prose will generally obtain a wider audience, even among the most fastidious readers, than poems, however good, in which the imagination is less creative, and the author rather describes or moralises over what is, than invents and vivifies what never existed. The advantage of the verse lies in its durability. Prose, when appealing to the imagination, has not the same characteristics of enduring longevity as verse; — first and chiefly, it is not so easily remembered. Who remembers twenty lines in 'Ivanhoe'? Who does not remember twenty lines in the 'Deserted Village'? Verse chains a closer and more minute survey to all beauties of thought expressed by it than prose, however elaborately completed, can do. And that survey is carried on and perpetuated by successive generations.

Digitized by Google

So that in a great prose fiction, one hundred years after its date, there are innumerable beauties of thought and fancy which lie wholly unobserved; and in a poem, also surveyed one hundred years after its publication, there is probably not a single beauty undetected. This holds even in the most popular and imperishable prose fictions, read at a time of life when our memory is most tenacious, such as 'Don Quixote' or 'Robinson Crusoe', 'Gulliver's Travels' or the 'Arabian Nights.' We retain, indeed, a lively impression of the pleasure derived from the perusal of those masterpieces; of the salient incidents in story; the broad strokes of character, wit, or fancy; but quotations of striking passages do not rise to our lips as do the verses of poets immeasurably inferior, in the grand creative gifts of Poetry, to those fictionists of prose. And hence the Verse Poet is a more intimate companion throughout time than the Prose Poet can hope to be. In our moments of aspiration or of despondency, his musical thoughts well up from our remembrance. By a couple of lines he kindles the ambition of our boyhood, or soothes into calm the melancholy contemplations of our age.

Cæteris paribus, there can be no doubt of the advantage of verse over prose in all works of the imagination. But an artist does not select his own department of art with deliberate calculation of the best chances of posthumous renown. His choice is determined partly by his own organisation, and partly also by the circumstances of his time. For these last may control and tyrannise over his own more special bias. For instance, in our country, at present, it is scarcely an exaggeration to say that there is no tragic drama—

Digitized by Google

scarcely any living drama at all; whether from the want of competent actors, or from some disposition on the part of our public and our critics, not to accord to a successful drama the rank which it holds in other nations, and once held in this, I do not care to examine; but the fact itself is so clear, that the Drama, though in reality it is the highest order of poem, with the exception of the Epic, seems to have wholly dropped out of our consideration as belonging to any form of poetry whatsoever. If an Englishman were asked by a foreigner to name even the minor poets of his country who have achieved reputation since the death of Lord Byron, it would not occur to him to name Sheridan Knowles — though perhaps no poet since Shakespeare has written so many successful dramas; nay, if he were asked to quote the principal poets whom England has produced, I doubt very much whether Ben Jonson, Beaumont, Fletcher, or Otway, would occur to his mind as readily as Collins or Cowper. We have forgotten, in short, somehow or other, except in the single instance of Shakespeare, that dramas in verse are poems, and that where we have a great dramatist, who can hold the hearts of an audience spell-bound, we have a poet immeasurably superior, in all the great qualities of poetry, to three-fourths of the lyrical, and still more of the didactic versifiers who, lettered and bound as British poets, occupy so showy a range on our shelves. It is not thus anywhere except in our country. Ask a Frenchman who are the greatest poets of France, he names her dramatists immediately — Corneille, Racine, Molière. Ask a German, he names Goethe and Schiller; and if you inquire which of the works of those great masters in all variety of song he considers their

Digitized by Google

greatest poems, he at once names their dramas. But to return; with us, therefore, the circumstances of the time would divert an author, whose natural bias might otherwise lead him towards dramatic composition, from a career so discouraged; and as the largest emoluments and the loudest reputation are at this time bestowed upon prose fiction, so he who would otherwise have been a dramatist becomes a novelist. I speak here, indeed, from some personal experience, for I can remember well, that when Mr. Macready undertook the management of one of those two great national theatres, which are now lost to the national drama, many literary men turned their thoughts towards writing for the stage, sure that in Mr. Macready they could find an actor to embody their conceptions; a critic who could not only appreciate, but advise and guide; and a gentleman with whom a man of letters could establish frank and pleasant understanding. But when Mr. Macready withdrew from an experiment probably requiring more capital than he deemed it prudent to risk in the mere rental of a theatre, which in other countries would be defrayed by the State, the literary flow towards the drama again ebbed back, and many a play, felicitously begun, remains to this day a fragment in the limbo of neglected pigeon-holes.

The circumstances of the time, therefore, though they do not arrest the steps of genius, alter its direction. Those departments of art in which the doors are the most liberally thrown open, will necessarily most attract the throng of artists; and it is the more natural that there should be a rush toward novel-writing, because no man and no woman who can scribble at all, ever doubt that they can scribble a novel. Certainly,

Digitized by Google

it seems that the kinds of writing most difficult to write well, are the easiest to write ill. Where are the little children who cannot write what they call poetry, or the big children who cannot write what they call novels?

"Scribimus indocti doctique poemata passim,"

says Horace of the writers of his day. In our day the saying applies in most force to that class of *poemata* which pretends to narrate the epic of life in the form of prose. For the *docti* as well as the *indocti* — men the most learned in all but the art of novel-writing — write novels, no less than the most ignorant; and often with no better success. One gentleman wishing to treat us with a sermon, puts it into a novel; another gentleman, whose taste is for political disquisition, puts it into a novel; High Church and Low Church and No Church at all, Tories and Radicals, and speculators on Utopia, fancy that they condescend to adapt truth to the ordinary understanding, when they thrust into a novel that with which a novel has no more to do than it has with astronomy. Certainly it is in the power of any one to write a book in three volumes, divide it into chapters, and call it a novel; but those processes no more make the work a novel, than they make it a History of China. We thus see many clever books by very clever writers, which, regarded as novels, are detestable. They are written without the slightest study of the art of narrative, and without the slightest natural gift to divine it. Those critics who, in modern times, have the most thoughtfully analysed the laws of æsthetic beauty, concur in maintaining that the real truthfulness of all works of imagination — sculpture,

Digitized by Google

painting, written fiction — is so purely in the imagination, *that the artist never seeks to represent the positive truth, but the idealised image of a truth.* As HEGEL well observes, "that which exists in nature is a something purely individual and particular. Art, on the contrary, is essentially destined to manifest the general." A fiction, therefore, which is designed to inculcate an object wholly alien to the imagination, sins against the first law of art; and if a writer of fiction narrow his scope to particulars so positive as polemical controversy in matters ecclesiastical, political, or moral, his work may or not be an able treatise, but it must be a very poor novel.

Religion and politics are not, indeed, banished from works of imagination; but to be artistically treated, they must be of the most general and the least sectarian description. In the record of the Fall of Man, for instance, Milton takes the most general belief in which all Christian nations concur, — nay, in which nations not Christian still acknowledge a myth of reverential interest. Or, again, to descend from the highest rank of poetry to a third rank in novel-writing; when Mr. Ward, in his charming story of 'Tremaine,' makes his very plot consist in the conversion of an infidel to a belief in the immortality of the soul, he does not depart from the artistic principle of dealing, not with particulars, but with generals. Had he exceeded the point at which he very wisely and skilfully stops, and pushed his argument beyond the doctrine on which all theologians concur, into questions on which they dispute, he would have lost sight of art altogether. So in politics; the general propositions from which politics start — the value of liberty,

Digitized by Google

order, civilisation, &c. — are not only within the competent range of imaginative fiction, but form some of its loftiest subjects; but descend lower into the practical questions that divide the passions of a day, and you only waste all the complicated machinery of fiction, to do what you could do much better in a party pamphlet. For, in fact, as the same fine critic, whom I have previously quoted, says, with admirable eloquence: —

"Man, enclosed on all sides in the limits of the finite, and aspiring to get beyond them, turns his looks towards a superior sphere, more pure and more true, where all the oppositions and contradictions of the finite disappear — where his intellectual liberty, spreading its wings, without obstacles and without limits, attains to its supreme end. This region is that of art, and its reality is the ideal. The necessity of the beau-ideal in art is derived from the imperfections of the real. The mission of art is to represent, under sensible forms, the free development of life, and especially of mind."

What is herein said of Art more especially applies to the art of narrative fiction, whether it take the form of verse or prose. For, when we come to that realm of fiction which, whether in verse or prose, is rendered most alluring to us, either by the fashion of our time or the genius of the artist, it is with a desire to escape, for the moment, out of this hard and narrow positive world in which we live; to forget, for a brief holiday, disputes between High Church and Low Church, Tories and Radicals — in fine, to lose sight of *particulars* in the contemplation of *general* truths. We can have our real life, in all its harsh outlines, whenever we please; we do not want to see that real life, but its ideal image, in the fable-land of art. There is another error common enough in second-rate novelists, and made still more common because it is praised by ordinary

Digitized by Google

critics — viz., an attempt at the exact imitation of what is called Nature. One writer will thus draw a character in fiction as minutely as he can, from some individual he has met in life; another perplexes us with the precise *patois* of provincial mechanics — not as a mere relief to the substance of a dialogue, but as a prevalent part of it. Now I hold all this to be thoroughly antagonistic to art in fiction — it is the relinquishment of generals for the servile copy of particulars. . . . . It cannot be too often repeated that art is *not* the imitation of nature: it is only in the very lowest degree of poetry — viz., the Descriptive — that the imitation of nature can be considered an artistic end. Even there, the true poet brings forth from nature more than nature says to the common ear or reveals to the common eye. The strict imitation of nature has always in it a something trite and mean: a man who mimics the cackle of the goose or the squeak of a pig, so truthfully, that for the moment he deceives us, attains but a praise that debases him. Nor this because there is something in the cackle of the goose, and the squeak of the pig, that in itself has a mean association; for as Kant says truly, "Even a man's exact imitation of the song of the nightingale displeases us when we discover that it is a mimicry, and not the nightingale." Art does not imitate nature, but it founds itself on the study of nature — takes from nature the selections which best accord with its own intention, and then bestows on them that which nature does not possess — viz., *the mind and the soul of man.*

Just as he is but a Chinese kind of painter, who seeks to give us, in exact prosaic detail, every leaf in a tree, which, if we want to see only a tree, we could see

Digitized by Google

in a field much better than in a picture; so he is but a prosaic and mechanical pretender to imagination who takes a man out of real life, gives us his photograph, and says, "I have copied nature." If I want to see that kind of man I could see him better in Oxford Street than in a novel. The great artist deals with large generalities, broad types of life and character; and though he may take flesh and blood for his model, he throws into the expression of the figure a something which elevates the model into an idealised image. A porter sate to Correggio for the representation of a saint; but Correggio so painted the porter, that the porter, on the canvas, was lost in the saint.

Some critics have contended that the delineation of character artistically — viz., through the selection of broad generalities in the complex nature of mankind, rather than in the observation of particulars by the portraiture of an individual — fails of the verisimilitude and reality — of the flesh-and-blood likeness to humanity — which all vivid delineation of human character necessarily requires. But this objection is sufficiently confuted by a reference to the most sovereign masterpieces of imaginative literature. The principal characters in Homer — viz., Achilles, Hector, Ulysses, Nestor, Paris, Thersites, &c. — are so remarkably the types of large and enduring generalities in human character, that, in spite of all changes of time and manners, we still classify and designate individuals under those antique representative names. We call such or such a man the Ulysses, or Nestor, or Achilles, or Thersites, of his class or epoch. Virgil, on the contrary, has, in Æneas, but a feeble shadow reflected from no bodily form with which we are

Digitized by Google

familiar, precisely because Æneas is not a type of any large and lasting generality in human character, but a poetised and half-allegorical *silhouette* of Augustus. There is, indeed, an antagonistic difference between fictitious character and biographical character. In biography, truth must be sought in the preference of particulars to generals; in imaginative creations, truth is found in the preference of generals to particulars. We recognise this distinction more immediately with respect to the former. In biography, and indeed in genuine history, character appears faithful and vivid in proportion as it stands clear from all æsthetic purposes in the mind of the delineator. The moment the biographer or historian seeks to drape his personages in the poetic mantle, to subject their lives and actions to the poetic or idealising process, we are immediately and rightly seized with distrust of his accuracy. When he would dramatise his characters into types, they are unfaithful as likenesses. In like manner, if we carefully examine, we shall see that when the Poet takes on himself the task of the Biographer, and seeks to give minute representations of living individuals, his characters become conventional — only partially accurate — the accuracy being sought by exaggerating trivial peculiarities into salient attributes, rather than by the patient exposition of the concrete qualities which constitute the interior nature of living men. Satire or eulogy obtrudes itself unconsciously to the artist, and mars the catholic and enduring truthfulness which, in works of imagination, belongs exclusively to the invention of original images for æsthetic ends.

Goethe, treating of the drama, has said, that "to be theatrical a piece must be symbolical; that is to say,

Digitized by Google

every action must have an importance of its own, and it must tend to one more important still." It is still more important, for dramatic effect, that the *dramatis personæ* should embody attributes of passion, humour, sentiment, character, with which large miscellaneous audiences can establish sympathy; and sympathy can be only established by such a recognition of a something familiar to our own natures, or to our conception of our natures, as will allure us to transport ourselves for the moment into the place of those who are passing through events which are not familiar to our actual experience. None of us have gone through the events which form the action of 'Othello' or 'Phèdre;' but most of us recognise in our natures, or our conceptions of our natures, sufficient elements for ardent love or agonising jealousy, to establish a sympathy with the agencies by which, in 'Othello' and 'Phèdre,' those passions are expressed. Thus, the more forcibly the characters interest the generalities of mankind which compose an audience, the more truthfully they must represent what such generalities of mankind have in common — in short, the more they will be types, and the less they will be portraits. Some critics have supposed that, in the delineation of types, the artist would fall into the frigid error of representing mere philosophical abstractions. This, however, is a mistake which the poet who comprehends and acts upon the first principle of his art — viz., the preference of generals to particulars — will be the less likely to commit, in proportion as such generals are vivified into types of humanity. For he is not seeking to personate allegorically a passion; but to show the effects of the passion upon certain given forms of character under certain given situations: And he secures

Digitized by Google

the individuality required, and avoids the lifeless pedantry of an allegorised abstraction, by reconciling passion, character, and situation with each other; so that it is always a living being in whom we sympathise. And the rarer and more unfamiliar the situation of life in which the poet places his imagined character, the more in that character itself we must recognise relations akin to our own flesh and blood, in order to feel interest in its fate. Thus, in the hands of great masters of fiction, whether dramatists or novelists, we become unconsciously reconciled, not only to unfamiliar, but to improbable, nay, to impossible situations, by recognising some marvellous truthfulness to human nature in the thoughts, feelings, and actions of the character represented, granting that such a character *could* be placed in such a situation. The finest of Shakespeare's imaginary characters are essentially typical. No one could suppose that the poet was copying from individuals of his acquaintance in the delineations of Hamlet, Macbeth, Othello, Iago, Angelo, Romeo. They are as remote from portraiture as are the conceptions of Caliban and Ariel. In fine, the distinctive excellence of Shakespeare's highest characters is that, while they embody truths the most subtle, delicate, and refining in the life and organisation of men, those truths are so assorted as to combine with the elements which humanity has most in common. And it is obvious to any reader of ordinary reflection, that this could not be effected if the characters themselves, despite all that is peculiar to each, were not, on the whole, typical of broad and popular divisions in the human family.

Turning to prose fiction, if we look to the great

Digitized by Google

novel which Europe has yet produced (meaning by the word novel a representation of familiar civilised life)—viz., 'Gil Blas' — we find the characters therein are vivid and substantial, capable of daily application to the life around us, in proportion as they are types and not portraits — such as Ambrose Lamela, Fabricio, the Archbishop of Grenada, &c.; and the characters that really fail of truth and completion are those which were intended to be portraits of individuals — such as Olivarez, the Duke de Lerma, the Infant of Spain, &c. And if it be true that, in Sangrado, Le Sage designed the portrait of the physician Hecquet (the ingenious author of the 'Système de la Trituration'), all we can say is, that the portrait is a coarse caricature of the original, and that Sangrado is a creation worthy of Le Sage's genius only where the author abandons the attempt at resemblance to an individual, and, in the freedom and sport of creative humour, involuntarily generalises attributes of character common to all professional fanatics. Again, with that masterpiece of prose romance or fantasy, 'Don Quixote,' the character of the hero, if it could be regarded as that of an individual whom Cervantes found in life, would be only an abnormal and morbid curiosity subjected to the caricature of a satirist. But regarded as a type of certain qualities which are largely diffused throughout human nature, the character is psychologically true, and artistically completed; hence we borrow the word "Quixotic" whenever we would convey the idea of that extravagant generosity of enthusiasm for the redress of human wrongs, which, even in exciting ridicule, compels admiration and conciliates love. The grandeur of the conception of 'Don Quixote' is its

Digitized by Google

fidelity to a certain nobleness of sentiment, which, however latent or however modified, exists in every genuinely noble nature. And hence, perhaps, of all works of broad humour, 'Don Quixote' is that which most approximates the humorous to the side of the sublime.

The reflective spirit of our age has strongly tended towards the development of a purpose in fiction, symbolical in a much more literal sense of the word than Goethe intended to convey in the extract I have quoted on the symbolical nature of theatrical composition. Besides the interest of plot and incident, another interest is implied, more or less distinctly or more or less vaguely, which is that of the process and working out of a symbolical purpose interwoven with the popular action. Instead of appending to the fable a formal moral, a moral signification runs throughout the whole fable, but so little obtrusively, that, even at the close, it is to be divined by the reader, not explained by the author. This has been a striking characteristic of the art of our century. In the former century it was but very partially cultivated, and probably grows out of that reaction from materialism which distinguishes our age from the last. Thus — to quote the most familiar illustrations I can think of — in Goethe's novel of "Wilhelm Meister," besides the mere interest of the incidents, there is an interest in the inward signification of an artist's apprenticeship in art, of a man's apprenticeship in life. In "Transformation," by Mr. Hawthorne, the mere story of outward incident can never be properly understood, unless the reader's mind goes along with the exquisite mysticism which is symbolised by the characters. In

Digitized by Google

that work, often very faulty in the execution, exceedingly grand in the conception, are typified the classical sensuous life, through Donato; the Jewish dispensation, through Miriam; the Christian dispensation, through Hilda, who looks over the ruins of Rome from her virgin chamber amidst the doves.

To our master novelists of a former age — to Defoe, Fielding, Richardson, and Smollett — this double plot, if so I may call it, was wholly unknown. Swift, indeed, apprehended it in 'Gulliver's Travels,' which I consider the greatest poem — that is, the greatest work of pure imagination and original invention — of the age in which he lived; and Johnson divined it in 'Rasselas,' which, but for the interior signification, would be the faulty and untruthful novel that Lord Macaulay has (I venture to opine, erroneously) declared it to be. Lord Macaulay censures 'Rasselas' because the Prince of Abyssinia does not talk like an Abyssinian. Now, it seems to me that a colouring faithful to the manners of Abyssinia, is a detail so trivial in reference to the object of the author of a philosophical romance, that it is more artistic to omit than to observe it. Rasselas starts at once, not from a positive but from an imagined world — he starts from the Happy Valley to be conducted (in his progress through actual life, to the great results of his search after a happiness more perfect than that of the Happy Valley) to the Catacombs. This is the interior poetical signification of the tale of 'Rasselas' — the final result of all departure from the happy land of contented ignorance is to be found at the grave. There, alone, a knowledge happier than ignorance awaits the seeker beyond the catacombs. For a moral so broad, intended

Digitized by Google

for civilised readers, any attempt to suit colouring and manners to Abyssinian savages would have been, not an adherence to, but a violation of, Art. The artist here wisely disdains the particulars — he is dealing with generals.

Thus Voltaire's Zadig is no more a Babylonian than Johnson's Rasselas is an Abyssinian. Voltaire's object of philosophical satire would have been perfectly lost if he had given us an accurate and antiquarian transcript of the life of the Chaldees; and, indeed, the worst parts in 'Zadig' (speaking artistically) are those in which the author does, now and then, assume a *quasi* antique Oriental air, sadly at variance with meanings essentially modern, couched in irony essentially French.

But the writer who takes this duality of purpose — who unites an interior symbolical signification with an obvious popular interest in character and incident — errs, firstly, in execution, if he render his symbolical meaning so distinct and detailed as to become obviously allegorical — unless, indeed, as in the 'Pilgrim's Progress,' it is avowedly an allegory; and secondly, he errs in artistic execution of his plan, whenever he admits a dialogue not closely bearing on one or the other of his two purposes, and whenever he fails in merging the two into an absolute unity at the end.

Now, the fault I find chiefly with novelists is their own contempt for their craft. A clever and scholar-like man enters into it with a dignified contempt. "I am not going to write," he says, "a mere novel." What, then, is he going to write? What fish's tail will he add to the horse's head? A tragic poet might as

Digitized by Google

order, civilisation, &c. — are not only within the competent range of imaginative fiction, but form some of its loftiest subjects; but descend lower into the practical questions that divide the passions of a day, and you only waste all the complicated machinery of fiction, to do what you could do much better in a party pamphlet. For, in fact, as the same fine critic, whom I have previously quoted, says, with admirable eloquence: —

"Man, enclosed on all sides in the limits of the finite, and aspiring to get beyond them, turns his looks towards a superior sphere, more pure and more true, where all the oppositions and contradictions of the finite disappear — where his intellectual liberty, spreading its wings, without obstacles and without limits, attains to its supreme end. This region is that of art, and its reality is the ideal. The necessity of the beau-ideal in art is derived from the imperfections of the real. The mission of art is to represent, under sensible forms, the free development of life, and especially of mind."

What is herein said of Art more especially applies to the art of narrative fiction, whether it take the form of verse or prose. For, when we come to that realm of fiction which, whether in verse or prose, is rendered most alluring to us, either by the fashion of our time or the genius of the artist, it is with a desire to escape, for the moment, out of this hard and narrow positive world in which we live; to forget, for a brief holiday, disputes between High Church and Low Church, Tories and Radicals — in fine, to lose sight of *particulars* in the contemplation of *general* truths. We can have our real life, in all its harsh outlines, whenever we please; we do not want to see that real life, but its ideal image, in the fable-land of art. There is another error common enough in second-rate novelists, and made still more common because it is praised by ordinary

Digitized by Google

critics — viz., an attempt at the exact imitation of what is called Nature. One writer will thus draw a character in fiction as minutely as he can, from some individual he has met in life; another perplexes us with the precise *patois* of provincial mechanics — not as a mere relief to the substance of a dialogue, but as a prevalent part of it. Now I hold all this to be thoroughly antagonistic to art in fiction — it is the relinquishment of generals for the servile copy of particulars. . . . . It cannot be too often repeated that art is *not* the imitation of nature: it is only in the very lowest degree of poetry — viz., the Descriptive — that the imitation of nature can be considered an artistic end. Even there, the true poet brings forth from nature more than nature says to the common ear or reveals to the common eye. The strict imitation of nature has always in it a something trite and mean: a man who mimics the cackle of the goose or the squeak of a pig, so truthfully, that for the moment he deceives us, attains but a praise that debases him. Nor this because there is something in the cackle of the goose, and the squeak of the pig, that in itself has a mean association; for as Kant says truly, "Even a man's exact imitation of the song of the nightingale displeases us when we discover that it is a mimicry, and not the nightingale." Art does not imitate nature, but it founds itself on the study of nature — takes from nature the selections which best accord with its own intention, and then bestows on them that which nature does not possess — viz., *the mind and the soul of man.*

Just as he is but a Chinese kind of painter, who seeks to give us, in exact prosaic detail, every leaf in a tree, which, if we want to see only a tree, we could see

Digitized by Google

order, civilisation, &c. — are not only within the competent range of imaginative fiction, but form some of its loftiest subjects; but descend lower into the practical questions that divide the passions of a day, and you only waste all the complicated machinery of fiction, to do what you could do much better in a party pamphlet. For, in fact, as the same fine critic, whom I have previously quoted, says, with admirable eloquence: —

"Man, enclosed on all sides in the limits of the finite, and aspiring to get beyond them, turns his looks towards a superior sphere, more pure and more true, where all the oppositions and contradictions of the finite disappear — where his intellectual liberty, spreading its wings, without obstacles and without limits, attains to its supreme end. This region is that of art, and its reality is the ideal. The necessity of the beau-ideal in art is derived from the imperfections of the real. The mission of art is to represent, under sensible forms, the free development of life, and especially of mind."

What is herein said of Art more especially applies to the art of narrative fiction, whether it take the form of verse or prose. For, when we come to that realm of fiction which, whether in verse or prose, is rendered most alluring to us, either by the fashion of our time or the genius of the artist, it is with a desire to escape, for the moment, out of this hard and narrow positive world in which we live; to forget, for a brief holiday, disputes between High Church and Low Church, Tories and Radicals — in fine, to lose sight of *particulars* in the contemplation of *general* truths. We can have our real life, in all its harsh outlines, whenever we please; we do not want to see that real life, but its ideal image, in the fable-land of art. There is another error common enough in second-rate novelists, and made still more common because it is praised by ordinary

Digitized by Google

critics — viz., an attempt at the exact imitation of what is called Nature. One writer will thus draw a character in fiction as minutely as he can, from some individual he has met in life; another perplexes us with the precise *patois* of provincial mechanics — not as a mere relief to the substance of a dialogue, but as a prevalent part of it. Now I hold all this to be thoroughly antagonistic to art in fiction — it is the relinquishment of generals for the servile copy of particulars. . . . . It cannot be too often repeated that art is *not* the imitation of nature: it is only in the very lowest degree of poetry — viz., the Descriptive — that the imitation of nature can be considered an artistic end. Even there, the true poet brings forth from nature more than nature says to the common ear or reveals to the common eye. The strict imitation of nature has always in it a something trite and mean: a man who mimics the cackle of the goose or the squeak of a pig, so truthfully, that for the moment he deceives us, attains but a praise that debases him. Nor this because there is something in the cackle of the goose, and the squeak of the pig, that in itself has a mean association; for as Kant says truly, "Even a man's exact imitation of the song of the nightingale displeases us when we discover that it is a mimicry, and not the nightingale." Art does not imitate nature, but it founds itself on the study of nature — takes from nature the selections which best accord with its own intention, and then bestows on them that which nature does not possess — viz., *the mind and the soul of man.*

Just as he is but a Chinese kind of painter, who seeks to give us, in exact prosaic detail, every leaf in a tree, which, if we want to see only a tree, we could see

Digitized by Google

order, civilisation, &c. — are not only within the competent range of imaginative fiction, but form some of its loftiest subjects; but descend lower into the practical questions that divide the passions of a day, and you only waste all the complicated machinery of fiction, to do what you could do much better in a party pamphlet. For, in fact, as the same fine critic, whom I have previously quoted, says, with admirable eloquence: —

"Man, enclosed on all sides in the limits of the finite, and aspiring to get beyond them, turns his looks towards a superior sphere, more pure and more true, where all the oppositions and contradictions of the finite disappear — where his intellectual liberty, spreading its wings, without obstacles and without limits, attains to its supreme end. This region is that of art, and its reality is the ideal. The necessity of the beau-ideal in art is derived from the imperfections of the real. The mission of art is to represent, under sensible forms, the free development of life, and especially of mind."

What is herein said of Art more especially applies to the art of narrative fiction, whether it take the form of verse or prose. For, when we come to that realm of fiction which, whether in verse or prose, is rendered most alluring to us, either by the fashion of our time or the genius of the artist, it is with a desire to escape, for the moment, out of this hard and narrow positive world in which we live; to forget, for a brief holiday, disputes between High Church and Low Church, Tories and Radicals — in fine, to lose sight of *particulars* in the contemplation of *general* truths. We can have our real life, in all its harsh outlines, whenever we please; we do not want to see that real life, but its ideal image, in the fable-land of art. There is another error common enough in second-rate novelists, and made still more common because it is praised by ordinary

Digitized by Google

critics — viz., an attempt at the exact imitation of what is called Nature. One writer will thus draw a character in fiction as minutely as he can, from some individual he has met in life; another perplexes us with the precise *patois* of provincial mechanics — not as a mere relief to the substance of a dialogue, but as a prevalent part of it. Now I hold all this to be thoroughly antagonistic to art in fiction — it is the relinquishment of generals for the servile copy of particulars. . . . . It cannot be too often repeated that art is *not* the imitation of nature: it is only in the very lowest degree of poetry — viz., the Descriptive — that the imitation of nature can be considered an artistic end. Even there, the true poet brings forth from nature more than nature says to the common ear or reveals to the common eye. The strict imitation of nature has always in it a something trite and mean: a man who mimics the cackle of the goose or the squeak of a pig, so truthfully, that for the moment he deceives us, attains but a praise that debases him. Nor this because there is something in the cackle of the goose, and the squeak of the pig, that in itself has a mean association; for as Kant says truly, "Even a man's exact imitation of the song of the nightingale displeases us when we discover that it is a mimicry, and not the nightingale." Art does not imitate nature, but it founds itself on the study of nature — takes from nature the selections which best accord with its own intention, and then bestows on them that which nature does not possess — viz., *the mind and the soul of man.*

Just as he is but a Chinese kind of painter, who seeks to give us, in exact prosaic detail, every leaf in a tree, which, if we want to see only a tree, we could see

Digitized by Google

psychological and metaphysical truth, with which he reconciles the motives and conduct of the characters he selects from history, to the situations in which they are placed, so as to elicit for them, under all that is peculiar to their nature or their fates, the necessary degree of sympathy from emotions of which the generality of mankind are susceptible.

But to the narrator of fiction — to the story-teller — the invention of fable and of imaginary character is obviously among the legitimate conditions of his art; and a fable purely original has in him a merit which it does not possess in the tragic or comic poet.

On the other hand, the skilful mechanism of plot, though not without considerable value in the art of narrative, is much less requisite in the Novelist than in the Dramatist. Many of the greatest prose fictions are independent of plot altogether. It is only by straining the word to a meaning foreign to the sense it generally conveys, that we can recognise a plot in 'Don Quixote,' and scarcely any torture of the word can make a plot out of 'Gil Blas.' It is for this reason that the novel admits of what the drama never should admit — viz., the operation of *accident* in the conduct of the story: the villain, instead of coming to a tragic close through the inevitable sequences of the fate he has provoked, may be carried off, at the convenient time, by a stroke of apoplexy, or be run over by a railway train. Nevertheless, in artistic narrative, accident, where it affects a *dénouement*, should be very sparingly employed. Readers, as well as critics, feel it to be a blot in the story of 'Rob Roy' when the elder brothers of Rashleigh Osbaldistone are killed off by natural causes unforeseen and unprepared for in the

Digitized by Google

previous train of events narrated, in order to throw Rashleigh into a position which the author found convenient for his ultimate purpose.

A novel of high aim requires, of course, delineation of character, and with more patient minuteness than the drama; and some novels live, indeed, solely through the delineation of character; whereas there are some tragedies in which the characters, when stripped of theatrical costume, are very trivial, while, despite the poverty of character, the tragedies themselves are immortal, partly from the skill of the plot, partly from the passion which is wrought out of the situations, and principally, perhaps, from the beauty of form — the strength and harmony of the verse. Thus, French critics of eminence have accorded to Racine, as a tragic poet, a rank equal to that of Corneille, although acknowledging the immense superiority of the latter in the treatment and conception of tragic character. The tragic drama imperatively requires passion — the comic drama humour or wit; but a novel may be a very fine one without humour, passion, or wit — it may be made great in its way (though that way is not the very highest one) by delicacy of sentiment, interest of story, playfulness of fancy, or even by the level tenor of everyday life, not coarsely imitated, but pleasingly idealised. Still mystery is one of the most popular and effective sources of interest in a prose narrative, and sometimes the unravelling of it constitutes the entire plot. Every one can remember the thrill with which he first sought to fathom the dark secret in 'Caleb Williams' or 'The Ghost-Seer.' Even in the comic novel, the great founder of that structure of art has obtained praise

Digitized by Google

for perfection of plot almost solely from the skill with which Tom Jones's parentage is kept concealed; the terror, towards the end, when the hero seems to have become involved in one of the crimes from which the human mind most revolts, and the pleased surprise with which that terror is relieved by the final and unexpected discovery of his birth, with all the sense of the many fine strokes of satire in the commencement of the tale, which are not made clear to us till the close.

To prose fiction there must always be conceded an immense variety in the modes of treatment — a bold licence of loose capricious adaptation of infinite materials to some harmonious unity of interest, which even the most liberal construction of dramatic licence cannot afford to the drama. We need no lengthened examination of this fact; we perceive at once that any story can be told, but comparatively very few stories can be dramatised. And hence some of the best novels in the world cannot be put upon the stage; while some, that have very little merit as novels, have furnished subject-matter for the greatest plays in the modern world. The interest in a drama must be consecutive, sustained, progressive — it allows of no *longueurs*. But the interest of a novel may be very gentle, very irregular — may interpose long conversations in the very midst of action — always provided, however, as I have before said, that they bear upon the ulterior idea for which the action is invented. Thus we have in 'Wilhelm Meister' long conversations on art or philosophy just where we want most to get on with the story — yet, without those conversations, the story would not have been worth the telling; and its object could not, indeed,

Digitized by Google

be comprehended — its object being the accomplishment of a human mind in the very subjects on which the conversations turn. So, in many of the most animated tales of Sir Walter Scott, the story pauses for the sake of some historical disquisition necessary to make us understand the altered situations of the imagined characters. I need not say that all such delays to the action would be inadmissible in the drama. Hence an intelligent criticism must always allow a latitude to artistic prose fiction which it does not accord to the dramatic, nor indeed to any other department of imaginative representation of life and character. I often see in our Reviews a charge against some novel, that this or that is "a defect of art," which is, when examined, really a beauty in art — or a positive necessity which that department of art could not avoid — simply because the Reviewer has been applying to the novel rules drawn from the drama, and not only inapplicable, but adverse, to the principles which regulate the freedom of the novel. Now, in reality, where genius is present, art cannot be absent. Unquestionably, genius may make many incidental mistakes in art, but if it compose a work of genius, that work must be a work of art on the whole. For just as virtue consists in a voluntary obedience to moral law, so genius consists in a voluntary obedience to artistic law. And the freedom of either is this, that the law is pleasing to it — has become its second nature. Both human virtue and human genius must err from time to time; but any prolonged disdain, or any violent rupture, of the law by which it exists, would be death to either. There is this difference to the advantage of virtue (for, happily, virtue is necessary to all men, and genius is but

Digitized by Google

the gift of few), that we can lay down rules by the observance of which any one can become a virtuous man; but we can lay dawn no rules by which any one can become a man of genius. No technical rules can enable a student to become a great dramatist or a great novelist; but there is in art an inherent distinction between broad general principles and technical rules. In all genuine art there is a sympathetic, affectionate, and often quite unconscious adherence to certain general principles. The recognition of these principles is obtained through the philosophy of criticism; first, by a wide and patient observation of masterpieces of art, which are to criticism what evidences of fact are to science; and next, by the metaphysical deduction, from those facts, of the principles which their concurrence serves to establish. By the putting forth of these principles we cannot make bad writers good, nor mediocre writers great; but we may enable the common reader to judge with more correctness of the real quality of merit, or the real cause of defect in the writers he peruses; and by directing and elevating his taste, rectify and raise the general standard of literature. We may do more than that — we may much facilitate the self-tuition that all genius has to undergo before it attains to its full development, in the harmony between its freedom and those elements of truth and beauty which constitute its law. As to mere technical rules, each great artist makes them for himself; he does not despise technical rules, but he will not servilely borrow them from other artists; he forms his own. They are the by-laws which his acquaintance with his special powers lays down as best adapted to their exercise and their sphere. Apelles is said to have made it a by-law to

Digitized by Google

himself to use only four colours in painting: probably Apelles found his advantage in that restraint, or he would not have imposed it on his pallet. But if Zeuxis found that he, Zeuxis, painted better by using a dozen colours than by confining himself to four, he would have used a dozen, or he would not have been Zeuxis.

On careful and thoughtful examination we shall find, that neither in narrative nor dramatic fiction do great writers differ on the principles of art in the works which posterity accepts from them as great — whereas they all differ more or less in technical rules. There is no great poetic artist, whether in Epic, Drama, or Romance, who, in his best works, ever represents a literal truth rather than the idealised image of a truth — who ever condescends to servile imitations of nature — who ever prefers the selection of particulars, in the delineation of character or the conception of fable, to the expression of generals — who does not aim at large types of mankind rather than the portraiture of contemporaries — or, at least, wherever he may have been led to reject these principles, it will be in performances, or parts of performances, that are allowed to be beneath him. But merely technical rules are no sooner laid down by the critics of one age, than they are scornfully violated by some triumphant genius in the next. Technical rules have their value for the artist who employs them, and who usually invents and does not borrow them. Those that he imposes on himself he seldom communicates to others. They are his secret — they spring from his peculiarities of taste; and it is the adherence to those rules which constitutes what we sometimes call his style, but more properly his manner. It is by such rules, imposed on himself, that Pope

Digitized by Google

forms his peculiar cæsura, and mostly closes his sense at the end of a couplet. When this form of verse becomes trite and hackneyed, up rises some other poet, who forms by-laws for himself, perhaps quite the reverse. All that we should then ask of him is success; if his by-laws enable him to make as good a verse as Pope's in another way, we should be satisfied; if not — not. One main use in technical rules to an author, if imposed on himself, or freely assented to by himself, is this — the interposition of some wholesome impediment to the over-facility which otherwise every writer acquires by practice. And as this over-facility is naturally more apt to be contracted in prose than in verse, and in the looseness or length of the novel or romance, than in any other more terse and systematic form of imaginative fiction — so I think it a wise precaution in every prolific novelist to seek rather to multiply, than emancipate himself from, the wholesome restraints of rules; provided always that such rules are the natural growth of his own mind, and confirmed by his own experience of their good effect on his productions. For if Art be not the imitator of Nature, it is still less the copyist of Art. Its base is in the study of Nature — not to imitate, but first to select, and then to combine, from Nature those materials into which the artist can breathe his own vivifying idea; and as the base of Art is in the study of Nature, so its polish and ornament must be sought by every artist in the study of those images which the artists before him have already selected, combined, and vivified; not, in such study, to reproduce a whole that represents another man's mind, and can no more be born again than can the man who created it; but again to select, to separate,

Digitized by Google

to recombine — to go through the same process in the contemplation of Art which he employed in the contemplation of Nature; profiting by all details, but grouping them anew by his own mode of generalisation, and only availing himself of the minds of others for the purpose of rendering more full and complete the realisation of that idea of truth or beauty which has its conception in his own mind. For that can be neither a work of art (in the æsthetic sense of the word) nor a work of genius in any sense of the word, which does not do a something that, as a whole, has never been done before; which no other living man could have done; and which never, to the end of time, can be done again — no matter how immeasurably better may be the *other* things which *other* men may do. 'Ivanhoe' and 'Childe Harold' were produced but the other day; yet already it has become as impossible to reproduce an 'Ivanhoe' or a 'Childe Harold' as to reproduce an 'Iliad.' A better historical Romance than 'Ivanhoe,' or a better contemplative poem than 'Childe Harold,' may be written some day or other; but, in order to be better, it must be totally different. The more a writer is imitated the less he can be reproduced. No one of our poets has been so imitated as Pope, not because he is our greatest or our most fascinating poet, but because he is the one most easily imitated by a good versifier. But is there a second Pope, or will there be a second Pope, if our language last ten thousand years longer?

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

ESSAY XXIV.

POSTHUMOUS REPUTATION.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

POSTHUMOUS REPUTATION.

POSTHUMOUS reputation! who can honestly say that posthumous reputation, in one sense of the phrase, is of no value in his eyes? If it were only heroes and poets, those arch-cravers of renown, who cared what were said of them after death, our village burial-grounds would lack their tombstones. A certain desire for posthumous reputation is so general that we might fairly call it universal. But I shall attempt to show that, being thus universal, it springs from sources which are common in human breasts, and not from that hunger for applause which is the exceptional characteristic of the candidates for Fame. It grows out of the natural affections or the moral sentiment, rather than the reasonings of intellectual ambition.

Be a man how obscure soever — as free from the desire of fame, as devoid of the capacities to achieve it — still the thought of sudden and entire forgetfulness would be a sharp pang to his human heart. He does not take leave of the earth without the yearning hope to retain a cherished place in the love or esteem of some survivors, after his remains have been removed into the coffin and thrust out of sight into the grave. The last "*Vale*" were, indeed, a dreary word without the softening adjuration, "*Sis memor mei.*" Even criminals themselves, in that confusion of reasoning which

Digitized by Google

appears inseparable from crime, reconciled, in death as in life, to names scorned by the honest (who to them, indeed, form a strange and foreign race), still hope for posthumous reputation among their comrades, for qualities which criminals esteem.

The Pirates in Byron's poem are not content to sink, without such honours as pirates afford, into the ocean that "shrouds and sepulchres their dead."

"Ours" — they exclaim, in the spirit of Scandinavian Vikings —

> "Ours the brief epitaph in danger's day,
> When those who win at length divide the prey,
> And cry — remembrance saddening o'er each brow —
> 'How had the brave who fell exulted now!'"

But if the bad cannot banish a desire to live after death in the affection even of the bad, where is the good man who, trained throughout life to value honour, can turn cynic on his deathbed, and say, "Let me in life enjoy the profitable credit for honesty, and I care not if, after death, my name be held that of a knave"?

All of us, then, however humble, so far covet posthumous reputation that we would fain be spoken and thought of with affection and esteem by those whose opinions we have prized, even when we are beyond the sound of their voices and the clasp of their hands. Such reputation may be (as with most of us it is) but a brief deferment of oblivion — the suspense of a year, a month, a day, before the final cancel and effacement of our footprint on the sands of Time. But *some* kindly reminiscence in *some* human hearts man intuitively yearns to bequeath; and the hope

Digitized by Google

of it comforts him as he turns his face to the wall to die.

But if this be a desire common to the great mass of our species, it must evidently rise out of the affections common to all — it is a desire for love, not a thirst for glory. This is not what is usually meant and understood by the phrase of posthumous reputation; it is not the renown accorded to the exceptional and rare intelligences which soar above the level of mankind. And here we approach a subject of no uninteresting speculation — viz., the distinction between that love for posthumous though brief repute which emanates from the affections and the moral sentiment, and that greed of posthumous and lasting renown which has been considered the craving, not of the heart nor of the moral sentiment, but rather of the intellect, and therefore limited to those who have the skill and the strength to vie for the palm awarded to the victor only when his chariot-wheels halt and the race is done. Competitors are many; victors, alas! are few. Out of all the myriads who have tenanted our earth, the number even of eminent intellects which retain place in its archives is startlingly small. The vast democracy of the dead are represented by an oligarchy to which that of Venice was liberal. Although successive races of laborious compilers and reverential antiquarians do their utmost to preserve in dusty shelves the bones and fossils of every specimen of man which has left a vestige of its being in the layers and strata of the past, it were as well, to a lover of fame, to sleep in his grave ignored, as to be dishumed, a forlorn fragment of what he once was, and catalogued alphabetically in a Biographical Dictionary.

Digitized by Google

Let us suppose some youthful poet whose heart is now beating loud with 'the immense desire of praise,' to whom his guardian angel lifts the veil of Futurity, and saith, "Thy name shall be preserved from oblivion. Lo! its place in yon compendium of embalmed celebrities, which scholars shall compile five centuries after thy decease. Read and exult!" The poet (his name be Jones) reads as follows under the letter J:—

"JONES, DAVID, a British author in the reign of Victoria I. Wrote many poems much esteemed by his contemporaries, some few fragments of which have been collected in the recent 'Anthology' of his learned and ingenious countryman, Professor Morgan Apreece; and, though characterised by the faults prevalent in his period, are not without elegance and fancy. Died at Caermarthen A. D. 1892."

Such would be a very honourable mention — more than is said in a Biographical Dictionary of many a bard, famous in his day; and yet what poet would not as willingly be left calm in 'God's Acre,' without any mention at all? Saith Sir Thomas Brown, in his quaint sublimity of style, "To be read by bare inscriptions, like many in Grüter — to hope for eternity by enigmatical epithets or first letters of our names — to be studied by antiquarians who we were, and have new names given us, like many of the mummies, — are cold consolation unto the students of perpetuity, even by everlasting languages."*

Yet, alas! how few of us can hope for the perpetuity even of an inscription "like those in Grüter!" Nor is this all; out of those few to whom universal assent and favouring circumstance have secured high

* 'Urn Burial.'

Digitized by Google

place in the motley museum of Fame, and lengthened account in the dreary catalogue of names, how very few there are whose renown would be a thing of envy to the pure and lofty ambition of heroic youth! How few in whom the intellectual eminence conceded to them is not accompanied by such alleged infirmities and vices of character, as only allow our admiration of the dead by compelling an indulgence which we could scarcely give, even to the dearest of our friends if living!

I am not sure whether any student of perpetuity, while the white of his robe is still without a weather-stain, and his first step lightly bounds up the steep

"Where Fame's proud temple shines afar,"

would be contented to leave behind him the renown of a Bacon's wisdom, coupled with those doubts of sincerity, manliness, gratitude, and honour, which Bacon's generous advocates have so ingeniously striven to clear away. On such points, who would not rather be unknown to posterity than need an advocate before its bar?

It is not the bent of my philosophy to disparage illustrious names. I am myself predisposed rather too implicitly to revere than too harshly to criticise the statues set up in Walhalla. I do not call Alexander the Great "the Macedonian madman" — I do not fix my eyes upon all the stains that historians discover in the toga of Julius Cæsar, nor peer through the leaves of his laurel wreath to detect only the bald places which the coronal hides. I gaze with no Cavalier's abhorrence on the rugged majesty of our English Cromwell. No three in the list of the famous are perhaps

Digitized by Google

more sure than these three of renown unwasted by the ages; yet, seeing all that has been said, can be said, and will be said against all three, and upon those attributes of character which I have been taught to consider more estimable than intellectual ability and power, I know not whether, after death, I would not rather have nothing said about me. It would give me no satisfaction to think that I

> "Leave a name at which the world grew pale,
> To point a moral or adorn a tale."

There is something in renown of that kind which is, after all, little better than a continuity of the ignorant gossip and uncivil slander which have so often made the great sadly wish that they were obscure. When the poet, who had achieved a fame more generally acknowledged throughout Europe than has perhaps been accorded to any poet in his own lifetime since the days of Petrarch, was on his deathbed, he did not exclaim, "I demand glory!" but sighed, "I implore peace!" Happy indeed the poet of whom, like Orpheus, nothing is known but an immortal name! Happy next, perhaps, the poet of whom, like Homer, nothing is known but the immortal works. The more the merely human part of the poet remains a mystery, the more willing is the reverence given to his divine mission. He may say with the prophet —

> "Mon empire est détruit si l'homme est reconnu."

Some kinds of posthumous renown there are indeed which the purest coveters of fame might envy. But such kinds of renown are the rarest; nor are they those which most fascinate the emulous eyes of youth by the pomps of intellectual splendour. For perhaps a certain

Digitized by Google

roughness of surface is necessary to the emission of that light which most strikes the remote beholder, as it is said the moon would be invisible to us were its surface even. And the renowns of which I now speak attract less by the glare of genius than by the just proportions of moral beauty, which the genius of others hallowing and revering them (as genius ever hallows and reveres all images of moral beauty), preserves distinct and clear by the tribute of its own rays.

What English gentleman would not rejoice to bequeath a name like that of Sir Philip Sidney? what French chevalier like that of Bayard? what cosmopolitan philanthropist like that of Howard? what republican patriot like that of Washington? what holy priest like that of Carlo Borromeo? But in all these serene and beautiful renowns the intellectual attributes, though not inconsiderable, are slight in comparison with the moral. The admiring genius of others, however, invests them with the intellectual glory which genius alone can bestow. They are of those whom poets do not imitate, but whom poets exalt and sanctify. Yet in the moral attributes which secure their fame they must have been approached by many of their contemporaries never heard of. For though in intellect a man may so lift himself above his class, his land, his age, that he may be said to tower alone as well as aloft, yet the moral part of him must, almost always, draw the chief supply of its nutriment from the surrounding atmosphere. Where we recognise in any one an image of moral elevation, which seems to us at the first glance unique and transcendent, I believe that, on a careful examination, we shall find that among his coevals, or in the very nature of his times, those qua-

Digitized by Google

lities which furnish forth their archetype in him were rife and prevalent. And if, in him, they have a more conspicuous and striking embodiment, it will be partly from circumstances, whether of birth, fortune, or favouring event, which first served to buoy up his merit to the surface of opinion, and then bear it onward in strong tide to the shore of fame; and partly from that force of will which is often neither a moral nor an intellectual property, but rather a result of physical energy and constitutional hardihood of nerve.

Again, some men have found in a grateful posterity the guardians of an enviable renown, less by any remarkable excellence of their own, than by the wrongs they have suffered in a cause which is endeared to the interests of mankind. Thus, William Lord Russell and Algernon Sidney are hallowed to English freemen so long as our history shall last. But if they had not died on the scaffold, it may be reasonably doubted whether they could still live in fame.

Seeing, then, that the prizes drawn from the funeral urn are so few, and among the few, so very few that are worth more than a blank, it is not surprising that the desire of posthumous reputation, though in itself universal, should rather contract into a yearning for affection or a regard for character, bounded to the memory of our own generation or the next, than expand into the grandiose conceit of ever-during fame. Nor do I believe that with those by whom such fame is won is the prophetic hope of it a prevalent motive power after the dreamy season of early youth. At the dawn of life, in our school and college days, we do but dimly see the line between life and death, — life seems so distinct and so long — death seems so vague

Digitized by Google

and so far. Then, when we think of fame, we scarce discern the difference between the living and the dead. Then, our enthusiasm is for ideals, and our emulation is to vie with the types that express them. It is less living men we would emulate than immaterial names. In the martial sports of our playground we identify ourselves not with a Raglan or a Gortschakoff, but with a Hector or Achilles. Who shall tell us that Hector and Achilles never lived? — to us, while in boyhood, they are living still, nay, among the most potent and vital of living men. We know not then what we could not do; we fancy we could do all things were we but grown-up men. We ignore the grave. As we live familiarly with the ancients, so we associate our own life with posterity. Is our first copy of verse, on the Ruins of Pæstum — is our first theme, to the text, '*Dulce et decorum est pro patriâ mori*,' — uncommended by our tasteless master, unadmired by our envious class, we have an undefined consolatory idea that posterity will do us justice. And posterity to us seems a next-door neighbour, with whom we shall shake hands, and from whom we shall hear polite compliments — not when we are dead, but when we are grown up. We are too full of life to comprehend that there is any death except for those old folks who cannot appreciate us. Bright and illustrious illusions! Who can blame, who laugh at the boy, who not admire and commend him, for that desire of a fame outlasting the Pyramids, by which he insensibly learns to live in a life beyond the present, and nourish dreams of a good unattainable by the senses? But when a man has arrived at the maturity of his reason, and his sight has grown sufficiently disciplined to recognise th-

Digitized by Google

boundaries of human life — when he has insensibly taught his ear to detect the hollow blare of those wind-instruments of fame which once stirred his heart like the fife of Calliope descending from heaven to blend the names of men with those of the Uranides, — the greed of posthumous renown passes away with the other wild longings of his youth. If he has not already achieved celebrity even among his own race, his sobered judgment reveals to him the slender chance of celebrity among the race which follows; living claimants are loud enough to absorb its heed. If he has achieved celebrity, then his post is marked out in the Present. He has his labours, his cares, his duties, for the day. He cannot pause to dream what may be said of him in a morrow that he will not greet. If really and substantially famous, his egotism is gone. He is moving with and for multitudes and his age; and what he writes, what he does, potential in his own time, must indeed have its influence over the times that follow, but often mediately, indirectly, and as undistinguishable from the influence of minds that blend their light with his own, as one star-beam is from another. And for the most part, men thus actively engaged in the work which commands the gaze of contemporaries, think as little of the fame which that work may or may not accord among distant races to the six or seven letters which syllable their names, as thinks a star whose radiance reaches us, of what poets may hymn to its honour, or astrologers assign to its effect, under the name by which we denote the star, whether we call it Jupiter or Saturn.

Certainly we may presume, that of all aspirants to posthumous renown, poets are the most ardent and the

Digitized by Google

most persevering — justly so; for of all kinds of intellectual merit, the poet's is that which contemporaries may the most fail to recognise. And yet among poets since the Christian era (I shall touch later on poets of the heathen time), we cannot, I think, discover any great anxiety for posthumous renown in those who lived long enough to fulfil their mission, and have received from posterity a homage that would have sanctioned their most confident appeal to a future generation. I say, those who lived long enough to fulfil their mission; and I mean, that when their mission was fulfilled — their great works done — their care for the opinion of posterity seems to have been anything but restless and over-eager. No doubt, in youth, the longing for posthumous renown in them was strong. In youth, that yearning might dictate to Milton the first conception of some great epic which the world would not willingly let die. But when, after the toils and sorrows of his hard career, the old man returned to the dream of his young ambition, the joy of his divine task seems to have been little commingled with vain forethought of the praise it might receive from men. He himself was so grand a man, and so fully conscious of his own grandeur, that, however it may wound our vanity to own it, I do not think he cared very sensitively what we light readers or scholastic critics might say of him, for or against. The audience which he hoped to find, "fit, though few," was, according to the guess of one of his shrewdest commentators, confined much to the sect of his own Puritan brethren.

Goethe compares the joy of the poet to the joy of the bird; — the bird sings because it is its nature to sing — not because it is to be praised for singing. But

Digitized by Google

Milton's joy was high beyond the bird's — it was the joy of a sublime human soul — the joy of lifting himself above man's judgment, as a great soul ever seeks to do — high above the evil days — the dangers and the darkness with which he was encompassed round.

True, he enjoins himself not

> "Sometimes to forget
> Those other two, equalled with me in fate
> (So were I equalled with them in renown),
> Blind Thamyris and blind Mæonides."

But the brief sigh for renown, less haughtily than modestly breathed forth in the parenthetical line, soon swells into the loftier prayer with which he closes his complaint of the loss of external day —

> "So much the rather thou, celestial light,
> Shine *inward*, and the mind through all her powers
> Irradiate!"

Poor and trivial, among sublimer consolations, would have been even the assured foreknowledge of that rank among the worldly subjects of mortal kings, which Addison's elegant criticism established for Burnet's blind schoolmaster — to him who, alone among poets, had the privilege to say —

> "Into the heaven of heavens I have presumed,
> An earthly guest, and drawn empyreal air."

Again, passages in Shakespeare's Sonnets, attesting Shakespeare's sensitive pain in the thought of his equivocal worldly status and vocation, may, not illogically, be held to imply a correspondent desire for the glory to which he may have known that his genius was the rightful heir. Indeed, if in his Sonnets he may be fairly presumed to speak in his own person (as I think the probable and natural supposition), and

Digitized by Google

not, as some contend, inventing imaginary sentiments for imaginary persons in imaginary situations — he indulges in an exulting vaunt of the immortality his young muse had already secured —

> "Not marble, not the gilded monuments
> Of princes, shall outlive this powerful rhyme."

But in his later days, when he attained to such reputation as the reigns of Elizabeth and James would accord to a playwriter, — and, luckier than most playwriters, and of course more prudent (for genius so complete as his is always eminently prudent, eminently practical), had saved or gained the means which allowed him to retire to New Place in Stratford — a gentleman, taking rank not with Homer and Sophocles, but with county squires — with a Master Slender, or even with a Justice Shallow, — he certainly appears to have given himself no trouble about preparing his works for us — that is, for posterity. He left them to take their chance with a carelessness that startles commonplace critics. Why so careless? — it startles me to think that critics can ask why. To an intellect so consummate as Shakespeare's, the thought of another world beyond the criticism of this world must have been very familiar; that it *was* familiar might, I think, be made clearly manifest by reference to the many passages and sentences in which, without dramatic necessity, and not always with dramatic fitness and effect, the great psychologist utters his own cherished thoughts through the lips of his imaginary creations.

Now, without straining too far lines in the Sonnets which appear to intimate his own mournful sense of humiliation in his calling of player, the age itself so austerely refused to recognise the stage as a school of

Digitized by Google

morals or an ally of religion, that possibly Shakespeare, who so solemnly attests his Christian faith in the Will written a year before his death, might have had some humble doubts whether his mighty genius had conferred those vast benefits on mankind which are now recognised in the wisdom of its genial and comprehensive humanity. And thus, silent as to the works of his mind, he speaks but of the deathless nature of his soul — "I commend my soul into the hands of God my Creator, hoping, and assuredly, through the only merits of Jesus Christ my Saviour, to be made partaker of life everlasting; and my body to the earth whereof it is made."

Campbell has thought that Shakespeare made a secret and touching reference to his retirement from his own magic art, in the work which is held by so many critics, including De Quincey, to have been the last (viz., 'The Tempest'), and which Dyce esteems the most elaborately finished, of all his plays; and there is so much in the sympathy by which one great poet often divines the interior parabolic significations veiled in the verse of another, that the opinion of Campbell has here an authority which will not be lightly set aside by thoughtful critics. Certainly, if Shakespeare were at that time meditating retirement from the practice of his art, he could scarcely have been more felicitously "inspired to typify himself" than in Prospero's farewell to the enchanted isle —

"Ye elves of hills, brooks, standing lakes, and groves," &c.

It is true that it cannot be clearly proved, any more than as yet it has been satisfactorily disproved, that the 'Tempest,' performed before James in 1611, five

Digitized by Google

years previous to Shakespeare's decease, really was the last drama which Shakespeare wrote; but if it were ascertained that, in his retirement at Stratford, he did, during those five intervening years, busy himself on some other play,* it would not confute the assumption that he had meant to typify himself in that farewell, and, at the time, had intended to write plays no more. Descartes at one moment seriously resolved to withdraw from philosophical pursuits, and yet revoked his resolution.

Be this as it may, one thing is certain, whether he did or did not write plays subsequent to the date of the 'Tempest,' he took no pains to secure their transmission to posterity, and evinced so little care even to distinguish those he had composed from other stock-pieces in his theatre, that it is only comparatively within a recent period that the many inferior plays assigned to his pen have been rejected from the list of his dramas; while one of the grandest of all his works, 'Lear,' is spoken of by Tate as "an obscure piece recommended to him by a friend."

My own experience of life, so far as it has extended, confirms the general views I have here taken with regard to the thirst for posthumous renown.

I have seldom known a very young man of first-rate genius in whom that thirst was not keen; and still more seldom any man of first-rate genius, who, after middle life, was much tormented by it, more especially if he had already achieved contemporaneous fame, and felt how little of genuine and unalloyed delight it bestows, even while its plaudits fall upon living ears.

* Dyce says, "I suspect that before 1613 he (Shakespeare) had entirely abandoned dramatic composition."

Digitized by Google

But, on the other hand, I daily meet with mediocre men, more especially mediocre poets, to whom the vision of a fame beyond the grave is a habitual hallucination.

And this last observation leads me to reflect on the strange deficiency of all clear understanding as to his degree of merit, which is almost peculiar to the writer of verse.

In most other departments of intellectual industry and skill, a man soon acquires a tolerably accurate idea whether what he is doing be good, bad, or indifferent; but the manufacturer of verse seems wholly unable to estimate the quality of the fabric he weaves, or perceive whether the designs he stamps or embroiders on it are really beauteous and original forms, or trite copies and graceless patterns. No matter how consummate his intelligence in other domains of mind, yet he may rank with the most stolid and purblind of self-deceivers when he has to pass judgment on his own rhymes.

Frederick the Great is certainly Fritz the Little when he abandons the tented field for the Pierian grot. Richelieu never errs in his conceptions of the powers at his command except when he plunges into rhyme — never, in his vainest moments, overrates his strength against courts and nobles and foreign armies, but is wholly unable to comprehend that he is not a match for Corneille in the composition of a tragedy.

Nay, what is still more strange, poets the most confessedly illustrious have not always been able to judge so well as the most commonplace and prosaic of their readers the relative merits of their own performances. Milton is said to have preferred his 'Paradise Regained' to his 'Paradise Lost;' Byron to have estimated his

Digitized by Google

imitations of Pope at a higher value than his 'Childe Harold' or his 'Siege of Corinth;' Campbell felt for 'Theodric' a more complacent affection than he bestowed on 'Gertrude of Wyoming;' and even Goethe, who judged his own compositions with a cooler and more candid survey than any other poet ever bestowed on the beloved children of his brain, can neither by artistic critics nor popular readers be thought justified in preferring the Second Part of 'Faust' to the First.

Possibly a main cause of this offuscation of intelligence in verse-writers may be found in the delight which the composition of verse gives to the author. And Richelieu explained why he, so acute in assessing his power for governing kingdoms, was so dull in comprehending his abilities for the construction of rhyme, in the answer he once gave to Desmarets, to whom he said, wearily, "In this troubled life of mine, what do you think constitutes my chief pleasure?" Desmarets, courtier-like, replied, "The thought that you are making the happiness of France." "*Pas du tout!*" answered Richelieu, "*c'est à faire les vers.*"

Now, the mere delight of making verse was perhaps quite as great in Richelieu as in Corneille — is as great in the schoolboy poetaster as in the loftiest bard; and in the loftiest bard not less, possibly even more, when he is rapidly and painlessly writing down to his lowest level, than when piling thought on thought, with carefully selected marbles of expression, up to his highest height. If it be truly reported of Virgil that he spent the morning in pouring forth his verses, and the evening in correcting, condensing, abridging, polishing the verses thus composed, the probability is that the morn-

Digitized by Google

ing's task was one of delight, and the evening's task one of pain. But without the evening's task, possibly the morning's task might not have secured to posterity the *Monstrum sine labe*, which Scaliger has declared Virgil to be.

The verse-maker's pleasure in his verse intoxicates him. It is natural that he should think that what so pleased him to write, it ought to please others to read. If it do not please them, it is the bad taste of the day — it is the malice of coteries — the ignorance of critics. Posterity will do him justice. And thus the veriest poetaster takes refuge in the thought of posterity, with as complacent an assurance as could possibly cheer the vision of the loftiest poet. Indeed, if the loftiest poet had been sensible of pain as well as pleasure in his composition, his pain would have made him sensible of his faults; whereas the poetaster, in composing, feels only the unalloyed satisfaction of belief in his merits. And thus, having cited one traditional anecdote of the painstaking Virgil, I may add another — viz., that, far from deeming himself *Monstrum sine labe*, he considered his 'Æneid' not sufficiently corrected and perfected for the eye of posterity, and desired that it should be destroyed.

I think, then, that a poet of some thought and modesty will hesitate before he admit as a genuine, solid, well-founded consolation for any present disparagement to which he may conceive his genius unjustly subjected, that belief in future admiration, which he must share in common with the most ordinary mortals who ever composed a hemistich. He can never feel quite sure that his faith in posterity is a sound one. Granted that he have an internal convic-

Digitized by Google

tion which appears to him a divine prescience, that posterity will reward him for the neglect of his own day; yet, if he will take the pains to inquire, he will find that an internal conviction, conceived to be a prescience just as divine, comforts the grocer's apprentice in the next street, whose hymns to Mary, or Marathon, or the Moon, have been churlishly refused admission into the Poet's Corner of a Monthly Magazine.

But, after all, a consolation for present disparagement or neglect, in the persuasion, well or ill founded, of praise awarded by a future generation, does not seem to me a very elevated source of comfort, nor do I think it would be dearly prized by a strong mind, which has matured its experiences of mortal life, and trained itself to reflect upon the scope and ends of an immortal spirit. Although most men destined to achieve large objects commence their career with a rich share of that love of approbation which is harshly called vanity, yet in masculine natures there is no property which more refines itself into vapour, and fades away out of the character, when completed, compact, rounded, solidified, by its own evolutions in the lengthened course of its orbit, than that same restless gaseous effervescence of motive power which, at the onset of the career, while the future star is still but a nebula, bubbles and seethes from the crudity of struggling forces. That passion for applause, whether we call it vanity or by some nobler name, has done its work in the organisation of the man when he has effected things that are substantially *worthy* of applause.

And here I may observe that there are three causes of satisfaction in the creation of works designed for endur-

Digitized by Google

ance, that are often confounded with the pleasure supposed to exist in the anticipation of the fame which may eventually honour the design. 1*st*, The satisfaction of art in the consultation of the elementary requisite of artistic construction; 2*d*, The satisfaction of what I call the intellectual conscience, and shall endeavour to define; 3*d*, The satisfaction of the moral conscience.

1*st*. Durability is the requisite of all constructive art; the artist intuitively aims at it in all his ideals of form, and the aim itself constitutes one of the steadiest, nor least vivid, of the Pleasures of Art. No great architect could feel much delight in his palaces if he built them of snow; and even should he build them of marble, his anguish, as artist, would be keen if he discovered that he had committed some so great fault in mechanics, that his girders and columns were unable to support his dome, and in a few years his fabric would be a ruin. Neither could any great writer rejoice in designing works in which he knew that the principle of duration was violated or ignored. What is thus true as a source of satisfaction in art is, though in lesser degree, true also in action, if the action be that of a constructor. Strenuous endeavour, in all really great minds, aims at durability, wherever it seeks to construct.

And in proportion to a man's belief in the worthiness of labours which necessitate the sacrifice of many fugitive joys, will be his satisfaction in the adoption of principles which tend to secure the result of those labours from decay. Nor is this all. In the very habit of consulting the object of permanence for the designs which he meditates, his whole mind ascends into a higher and calmer atmosphere of intellectual

Digitized by Google

enjoyment; he is less affected by the cares and troubles of the immediate hour in his positive existence, and less mortified by any shortlived envy or neglect to which his intellectual or ideal existence is subjected. As the eye finds a soothing charm in gazing on extended prospects, so does the mind take pleasure in contemplating objects remote in time:

"'Tis distance lends enchantment to the view."

2*d.* There is an intellectual as well as a moral conscience; and the content of both is serene and full in proportion as the attraction to things evanescent is counteracted by the attraction towards objects that endure. Hence genius is patient as well as virtue, and patience is at once an anodyne and a tonic — nay, more, it is the only stimulant which always benefits and never harms.

3*d.* There is a cheering pleasure to the moral conscience akin to that of beneficence, in the construction of intellectual works worthy of duration — a satisfaction which every human being not indifferent to the welfare of his kind may reasonably conceive in the design of things that may contribute to the uses and enjoyments of succeeding generations.

But all these three sources of gratification are wholly distinct from the vainer and ignobler calculations of reward for present labours in the imagined murmur of future plaudits. For, after all, perhaps the best of what a man of genius (whatever his fame may be) has accomplished, is never traced popularly or distinctly home to him. He suggests infinitely more than he can perform — what he performs is visible,

Digitized by Google

what he suggests is undiscerned. Whether in science, or art, or action, he implants many an idea in other minds, which they develop in their own way, unconscious of what they owed to the originator. Can any living poet tell us, or divine himself, what he owes to Shakespeare, to Homer, or perhaps to some forgotten ballad, chanted low by an old woman's cracked voice when he lay half asleep, half awake, and the shadows of twilight crept along his nursery-floors? Let me start a great thought — let me perform a noble action — and the effects thereof may continue, impelling wave after wave of the world's moral atmosphere till the last verge of time; but that I should publish the thought or do the action from a motive of reward in human praise, would neither evince a sublime generosity of mind, nor a prudent calculation of probable results. For whether the praise be now or a thousand years hence, it would still be but human praise; and if there would be something inherently vain in my nature, and vulgar in my ambition, did I make myself a mere seeker of applause now, I do not see that I should be more magnanimous because the applause thus coveted was a deferred investment. All I can see is, that I should be less rational; for at least applause now I can enjoy — applause when I am dead I cannot.

Nor would it be a sign of a disciplined intellect to forget the unpleasant truth illustrated by so vast a majority of instances — viz., that a man who cannot win fame in his own age, will have very small chance of winning it from posterity. True, there are some half-dozen exceptions to this truth among millions of myriads that attest it; but what man of common sense

Digitized by Google

would invest any large amount of hope in so unpromising a lottery!

Now, in proportion as some earnest child of genius and labour, with capacities from which renown emanates and travels as light does from a sun, nears the mystery of the grave, it is a reasonable supposition that his mind will more solemnly take into its frequent meditation the increasing interest of the mighty question to which the very thought of the grave invites all who have learned to think. Either he arrives at a firm conviction, or at least at a strong belief, one way or other — or he remains in that indecision of doubt which distrusts a guide and disdains a guess. If his conviction or belief be that which I conceive to be exceedingly rare in men of genius, — viz., that when the breath passes from his clay, his sense of being, his *Ego*, is eternally annihilated, and all of him that remain indestructible are what he in life despised as the meanest and rudest parts of him — viz., the mere elements of his material form escaping from his coffin to furnish life to some other material form, vegetable or organic, with which he can have no conscious identity, no cognate affinity, — I cannot conceive by what confusion of ideas he could rejoice in some remote honour paid to the *Ego* blotted evermore out of creation. I can understand that a man adopting this Sadducean creed might still care what his children, his friends, might think of him when absorbed in the *Néant* or Nothingness which Danton understood by the word Death; because, though he may argue himself out of the perceptions of his soul, he has obeyed, perhaps to the last kiss of his faltering lip, the last wistful look of his glazing eye, the feelings of his heart; and it is his

Digitized by Google

heart which bids him hope that the children he loves, the friends he regrets to leave, should, if but for their sakes, feel no shame in mourning him who so loved and cherished them. But an egotistical desire for mere fame continued after the *Ego* itself is annihilated — after children and friends are annihilated in their turn; a fame which, howsoever long it may endure, is but to be transmitted to races all as perishable in thought and spirit as himself, momentary animations of mere salts and minerals and gases — evanescent as May-flies on a rivulet, and obeying but instincts as limited to the earth they scarcely touch ere they quit, as are an ant's to the wants of its toilsome commonwealth; — a desire for posthumous fame, on the conditions founded on such belief, were a bloodless and imbecile vanity, to which a man worthy to win fame could scarcely bow even his human pride.

But if on this subject of spiritual immortality a man approach the grave with no conviction — no belief one way or other (simply in that state of sceptic doubt with which philosophy commences inquiry, and out of which into some definite conclusion or other it must emerge if it would solve a single secret or hazard a single guess into truth), then, I apprehend that the very coolness of his temperament would preserve him from any very eager desire for a thing so airy and barren — so unphilosophical in itself as the vague echo of a name. Minds thus cautiously hesitating before they can acknowledge the substance of proofs, are not likely to be the superstitious adorers of a phantom.

Lastly, if a man of strong mind and bright imagination has come to the firm conviction or pervading faith that he begins after death to live again in some

Digitized by Google

region wholly remote from earth, with wholly new perceptions adapted to new destinations, the desire of mere renown on the spot to which for an infinitesimally brief period of his being he has been consigned, may indeed be conceived, may at moments be even keen, but it will not be constant, nor, when it stirs within him, be long indulged. For it could scarcely fail to become subordinate (in proportion to the height of his aspirations and the depth of his intellect) to the more important question — how far he has been preparing and training himself, not for renown to the name which on quitting earth he will have more cast off and done with than Pythagoras had cast off and done with that of Euphorbus, but rather for new name and new rank in that great career which only commences when earth and its names are left.

Thus the dream of fame, so warm and vivid in very early youth, gradually obtains its euthanasia, among the finest orders of minds, in a kind of serene enthusiasm for duty. The more beautiful and beautifying is the nature of the man, the more beauty that nature throws into its ideals of duty. So that duty itself loses its hard and austere aspects, and becomes as much the gracious and sweet result of impulses which mellow into habits, as harmony is the result of keys and chords fitted and attuned to music.

Among the ancients, the peculiar religious conceptions of a future life seem to have given to the desire of posthumous fame, a force, a fervour, which it could scarcely draw from any existent mode of psychological belief, whether that of a Christian or a deistical philosopher. For with either of the last this life is but an initiation — a probation; and the life hereafter is not

Digitized by Google

a spectral continuance of the same modes of being, but a fresh and strange existence — immeasurably, ineffably more glorious, at least for those not condemned to lasting punishments by the Divine Judge — and (where the philosopher ventures on speculations warranted to his reason, by analogies from natural laws) a state of development and progress such as becomes the sublime notion of a being exalted from material into spiritual spheres. But the popular, and indeed (with the exception of a few segregated sages) the almost universal idea of the classic ancients as to a future state even for the Blessed, was not one of progress and development, but of a pale imitation in the sunless Elysian fields of the pursuits which had pleased on earth. It is no wonder that Horace should exult to have built in his verse a monument of himself more perennial than brass; when, in his vision of the realms of Proserpine and the chosen seats of the Pious, Sappho still wailingly sings of her mortal loves, and Alcæus, in more ample strain, chants to his golden lyre the hardships of ship-wreck and flight and war. To recall the span of life was the only occupation of eternity. The more contentious and strifeful the reminiscences invoked, the more agreeably they relieved the torpor of unwilling repose —

"Magis
Pugnas et exactos tyrannos
Densum humeris bibit aure volgus."

Putting aside the speculative conjectures of their philosophers, the notions of a future state conceived by the ancients have no representation in any of the three sections of modern doctrine at which I have superficially glanced. They did not doubt, with the modern sceptic — did not accept a natural religion, like the

Digitized by Google

modern deist, nor rely upon the distinct assurances of a divine revelation, like the modern Christian. They maintained the continuance after death of an unsatisfactory, unalluring state of being, in which the mortal, conducted by Mercury to Charon's boat, was, in mind, desire, and thought, as in bodily form, but the ghost and larva of his former self. In the fields of Asphodel, nothing new, nothing more, was to be done throughout the flat waste of wearisome eternity — mortal life alone was the sphere of intellect and action. What, therefore, the mortal had done in life was all that the immortal could do throughout the endless ages. And as the instinct of immortality is not, when it be profoundly examined, the mere craving to live on, but, with all finer natures, the craving to live worthily, hereafter as here; so, to genius the life even of Elysian fields being but an objectless, unprogressive existence, the very instinct of the only immortality in any way correspondent to its powers as well as to its aspirations served to intensify the desire of perpetuity for the things achieved in the sole sphere of life wherein anything at all could be achieved. And as the brightest joy the Elysian wanderer could experience was in the remembrance of his glories past, so the fame for glories past in his life of man formed a practical idea of enduring solace, even in the notions a heathen formed of his life as spirit. Nor can even the philosopher thoroughly escape the influence of the prevalent and popular tenets of his age. And thus the old philosophers, in their rejection of vulgar fables, and their more enlightened conceptions of the destination of souls, did not, and could not, attain to the same spiritual elevation of thought as is at this day mechanically

Digitized by Google

attained by even the philosophical deist, who, in rejecting Christianity, at least takes his start into speculation from the height he quits. For his idea of a soul's destination will include total change of earthly pursuits and ends — development and progress through the eternity he concedes to it.

Thus, among the ancients of the classic world, as among our Teuton or Scandinavian forefathers, the life of ghost being little more than the pale reflection of the life of man, the man not unnaturally identified his ambition with that renown amongst men, the consciousness of which would form the most vivid of his pleasures, and afford him the highest rank, in the Realm of Shadow.

It is not so to the psychologist, who associates his notion of immortal life with that of infinite progress, and lifts the hope of virtue farther and farther from the breath of man — nearer and nearer towards the smile of God.

Let us consider! Suppose you were to say to an intelligent, aspiring child, at a small preparatory school, "The reward to which you must look forward, as inducement and encouragement to all your present toils and privations, is the renown you will leave in this little school when you have left it. No matter how repugnant now your lessons, no matter how severe your floggings, no matter how cruel the boys, nor how unjust the master — is it not a sublime consolation, a sustaining joy, that, fifty years after you have gone out of these narrow walls into the spacious world on which they open, other little boys, in skeleton-jackets like your own, will point to the name you have carved on your desk, and say, 'He was one of us'?"

I suspect that the child, being intelligent and aspir-

Digitized by Google

ing, would answer, if permitted to speak frankly, "Sir, that is all very well; but in itself such anticipation would not console me in my sufferings, nor sustain me in my trials. Certainly I should be well pleased, while I am here, to be admired by my schoolfellows and praised by my masters; that hope would encourage and animate me, as a present reward for present labours; but when you bid me look into the future for reward, my mind does not conceive it probable that it will go back to the past life in this little school — involuntarily it goes forward to that wide world, which, as you say, opens out of the school, and for which my lessons here educate and prepare me; and to win high place among those in that larger world is a dream of ambition much more inspiring, and much more comforting, than any thought of what little boys in skeleton-jackets may say of me in this little school, fifty years after I have left it, and forgotten all the troubles and torments I experienced herein."

Yet what preparatory school, as compared with the great world it leads to, can be to the child so small and insignificant as the scope of this life must seem to the man who believes himself immortal, compared with the infinity for which this life educates his soul? And if, on the other side of the grave, we allow ourselves to suppose that a departed spirit could be made aware of the renown which it has left on this — could learn that, centuries or cycles after it had quitted the poor painful little school, the name it had carved on its old worm-eaten desk was still visible, and pointed out to new-comers by the head boys with respect — we can scarcely conceive that this long-departed spirit would feel any very sensible joy.

Digitized by Google

For indeed it does happen to many of us to be told in middle life or old age, that at the little preparatory school — where, after some mental effort, we can just dimly remember that our knuckles were once rapped by an usher, and our tasks once rewarded by a badge of ribbon, or even a silver medal — litte boys, little as we were then, do talk of us, do point to the name we so clumsily carved on our desk, and do say, "That fellow was one of the cleverest boys we ever had at the school." And yet I do not think that when, from time to time, such complimentary intelligence comes to us — mature men — it dwells on our minds for more than a moment or so. It may give a transient and luke-warm gratification; but the grander occupations of our mature life, in grander spheres of action, engage and absorb us, and lift our sources of joy high beyond the reminiscence of petty triumphs achieved by us when little children. Five hundred years is a long term for renown on earth, yet it is not too much to hope that five hundred years after an immortal being has left this world, he will be at least as far advanced and exalted in the measureless course of his progress — above his proudest achievements in this human life — as a man of sixty can be advanced and exalted in the development of his powers beyond the Gradus and Syntax he dog-eared fifty years ago.

Out of these reflections grows a psychological query, which, as it often occurs to me when meditating on such subjects, I venture to cast forth in suggestion. Assuming, as sufficiently borne out by evidence, the propositions herein laid down — viz., that the desire for posthumous reputation is so far common to mankind, that few of us do not desire that those we love and

Digitized by Google

esteem should cherish and respect our memory for what are called our moral qualities — while the desire of renown among those not endeared to us by personal love and esteem, for qualities purely intellectual, is limited to very few, and of those few, fewer still (nor they, perhaps, the worthiest of renown) with whom the desire is either intense or habitual after the season of youth; — assuming, I say, the general truth of those propositions, may it not be possible, seeing how far the great scheme of Providence embraces general laws rather than particular exceptions, and makes most enduring the phenomena most general and least exceptional — may it not be possible that, while we retain in the next life the same or kindred instincts of affection, the same or kindred substrata of moral being, our purely intellectual attributes may undergo a complete transformation — that a wholly new order of those mental faculties which we here, in vulgar phrase, call our "talents," may grow up within altered organisations fitted to the wholly new range of destinies and duties to which we are removed and readapted? Now, when we pursue the thoughts which this query humbly starts, we are certainly compelled to allow that by far the greater number of these intellectual faculties or "talents" are specially applicable to the special order of things which belongs to this life, and for which no philosophical speculation on the next life enables us to conjecture any renewal of analogous uses.

I may have the special talents that fit me to be a great general, or a great lawyer, or a great surgeon; and for such talents, in such fitting application of them in this life, I may, in this life, obtain great renown, though, apart from the special talents for

Digitized by Google

which the renown is obtained, I may be but a very ordinary mortal. Nor can I, by any stretch of imagination, suppose that any field for these special talents lies yonder — in the spiritual empyrean. There, surely, no spirit will have to consider how many other spirits he can destroy with the least destruction of life to his own spiritual followers; there, surely, no spirit can find exercise for those talents so valued here, by which witnesses are puzzled, juries dazzled, truth clipped or counterfeited by the craft of a glozing tongue; there, surely, will be no work for the surgeon's skill — no bones to set, no limbs to amputate — no discoveries in blood and tissues, such as give fame to a Harvey or a Bichat. So far as concerns the special talents which their whole intellectual organisation here was devoted to enlarge and enrich, the occupations of these Othellos — martial, forensic, clinical — would be gone.*

Do the followers of art arrogate better right of perpetuated exercise to their special talents — or may we not rather doubt if an immortal being, removed from the sphere of academies and galleries, exhibitions and patrons, would even desire to go on through eternity sculpturing and painting? Orators, to whom, here, we accord such popular renown, would find small profit from Quintilian's lessons, in realms where nothing wrong can be defended, and nothing right can be attacked. Even authors, alas! may not secure to their "talents" the scope and delight of perpetuated scribbling. For each author has his own speciality, whereby he wins, here, his fame: one is a poet, another a

* The thought here expressed is, in a previous Essay (vol. I. p. 162), applied to 'Hints on Mental Culture:' "This world is a school for the education not of a faculty, but of a man."

Digitized by Google

novelist, a third a historian, a fourth a critic, and a fifth perhaps a political pamphleteer. But out of any of these special departments of intellect subtract the special pabulum that the soil of each department requires — subtract this world of men, with men's fleeting interests and passions — and there would remain little or nothing for which the special faculty of the author is adapted. The poet, perhaps, would claim a superb exemption — he would contend for the privilege of eternal versifying, as the highest occupation of spiritual existence. But if you take from any poet to whom criticism here accords the highest order, the theses of crime and war, pity and terror, suffering and strife — you take away all that gave to his special faculty as poet its noblest exercise and its most confessed renown. He might still, it is true, describe and moralise, but it were some discouragement to that anticipation to be told by Hegel, that of all departments of poetic art, the descriptive and didactic are the lowest. And to describe and moralise as spirit in a spiritual state of being! — what special faculty in mortal poet would be fitted to describe what no mortal heart can conceive, or to moralise where no immorality is permitted? Nay, even the genius of the great preacher, who has devoted his special faculties to the holiest uses, will have surely no need to preach to immortals. It is not his talents as preacher — though here their uses are so vast — though here the renown they bequeath is so august; but rather the purity and the lovingness of motive — the moral qualities, in short, that animated the talents, dictated their uses, beautified the preacher's whole moral being — which we may reasonably conceive continued, perpetuated, developed

Digitized by Google

in a world where there are no sins to denounce and no sorrows to console.

The philosophers, as the seekers after nature and explorers of the unknown, have implied, in many an eloquent page, that their special talents are those best fitted for celestial regions. But, unluckily for this assumption, it is a maxim received among philosophers themselves, from the days of Aristotle down to those of Sir William Hamilton, that philosophy ceases where truth is acknowledged. Instancing the received doctrine of gravitation, Sir William Hamilton says, "Arrived at the general fact that all bodies gravitate towards each other, we inquire no farther." Again, "The sciences always studied with keenest interest are those in a state of progress and uncertainty; absolute certainty and absolute completion would be the paralysis of any study; and the last, worst calamity that could befall man as he is at present constituted, would be that full and final possession of speculative truth which he now vainly anticipates as the consummation of his intellectual happiness." Thus the genius, and even the desire, of philosophy ceases in any state of being where truth ceases to be uncertain. The special talents of the philosopher are those which enable him keenly to detect, and cautiously to trace, a something in creation previously obscured or hidden. But let the something be made clear and acknowledged, and there is nothing left to philosophise about. So that when we come to examine, not only do the occupations for those special intellectual faculties which we call our "talents," and on which earthly renown is bestowed, seem to terminate with their special uses for their exercise on

Digitized by Google

earth; but the stimulants and motives which have called forth their exercise would be withdrawn in a state of being which, according to all enlightened conjecture, must be distinguished from this by the very absence of those causes in human passion, contest, suffering, error, by which such special faculties are quickened and impelled. And seeing that, by the Divine Guide towards the future whom Christians revere, so much stress is laid on cultivating the affections of the heart, and the moral sentiments which conduce to moral improvement, while no stress is laid on the elaborate culture of purely intellectual faculties (as it was by those Greek philosophers who seem to have regarded the affections of the heart with sublime contempt, and made moral improvement the result of that scholastic wisdom into which they resolved virtue, and which not one man in a million could have the leisure to acquire or the wit to understand, so that their conception of the blessed would have been a college of lecturing sages), — this comparative silence of Christian doctrine as to heavenly reward for the intellectual faculties which win earthly renown, may have deeper reason than at first glance appears; — viz., not only because Christian promise being extended to illiterate multitudes as well as to the cultured few, only those requirements for immortal reward were enforced, with which the peasant as well as the sage could comply; but also because the foundations of our future spiritual reconstruction are in those portions of our being which are given to us in common, and not in those special faculties or talents which may be as exclusively adapted to this earth as are the instincts of the caterpillar to his state of cater-

Digitized by Google

pillar, and may undergo as great and entire a change as do the instincts of the insect when it abandons its creeping form and hovers in the air — a butterfly.

Possibly, at first sight, the views here suggested may seem discouraging to our human intellectual pride. "What," I may ask, "are the faculties I have so studied — whether as soldier, lawyer, surgeon, artist, author, orator — to develop and ripen here, as the finest part of my being, and to my pre-eminence in which my fellow-men accord their praise, — are those faculties to perish while I myself do not perish? No; whither goes my soul, must go my mind; whither goes my mind, must go those special faculties which my mind has the most diligently cultivated and the most largely developed." Vain presumption! Whither goes the soul, may go the mind — but a mind so wholly changed, that it no longer needs, for the purveyors of ideas, the senses of the material body, nor the inducements to special purposes and uses limited to an initiatory stage of trial.

For the rest, so long as I myself — the personal integral Ego, conscious of identity — survive, and am borne to a higher state of development, it is no extravagant supposition, that if what are now called my faculties or talents, being no longer needed, fade out from my new phase of being, they will be succeeded by other capacities and powers of which I cannot conceive nor conjecture (so foreign they will be to my present modes of thought and existence), but which may be so incomparably loftier than those I now complacently value, that could I foreknow the difference I should smile to think I had pined to carry my spark of glow-worm into the splendours of celestial light.

Digitized by Google

ESSAY XXV.

ON SOME AUTHORS IN WHOSE WRITINGS KNOWLEDGE OF THE WORLD IS EMINENTLY DISPLAYED.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

ON SOME AUTHORS IN WHOSE WRITINGS KNOWLEDGE OF THE WORLD IS EMINENTLY DISPLAYED.

We all understand what is meant by "Knowledge of the World," yet it is not very easy to define the meaning. It is not identical with Knowledge of Mankind; for authors who have shown in their writings considerable knowledge of mankind, have been notable in their lives for blunders incompatible with Knowledge of the World. No one, on reading Steele's Essays in the 'Tatler' or 'Spectator,' could say, "This writer is without knowledge of mankind." No one can read Steele's biography and not wonder that a man of intellect so ready, and when in print so acute, should not acquire enough knowledge of the world to save him from those credulous imprudences and restless levities of venture which are generally confined to the raw inexperience of a novice in life. Goldsmith cannot be said, by the most disparaging of his critics, to have evinced an ignorance of mankind; and the most enthusiastic of his admirers will admit that, when it came to knowledge of the world, the author of 'the Vicar of Wakefield,' 'The Good-natured man,' and 'The Traveller,' was little better than a baby.

If Knowledge of the World be not identical with

Digitized by Google

a poet's or a thinker's Knowledge of Mankind, neither is it identical with a politician's knowledge of his time and country. For supremacy in that latter kind of knowledge has secured power to statesmen who have been considered, even by their own admirers, singularly deficient in knowledge of the world. Certainly no Minister ever better understood his time and country than the younger Pitt. The main cause of his precocious and enduring ascendancy may be found in that remarkable sympathy with public opinion, which is the most incontestable proof of a statesman's comprehension of the spirit of his age and nation. Yet his familiar friends remarked, half in complaint, half in eulogy, that he had no knowledge of the world. Mr. Wilberforce even says that he wanted knowledge of mankind. On the other hand, Mr. Fox is said to have had very great knowledge of the world. It was his superior repute for that knowledge which assigned to him rather than to Mr. Burke the leadership of the Whig party in the House of Commons. Yet, if there be one thing more than another which excluded the genius of Mr. Fox from the prizes of power, it was that defective comprehension of his time and his countrymen which made him so frequently at variance with public opinion, even when most ardently desirous of popular applause.

Knowledge of the World, so far as the phrase will bear explanation, seems to imply a knowledge of the manners and habits, the ordinary motive-springs and the conventional movements, of that society which is to the world what the surface is to the sea: and to be distinguished from knowledge of a larger and deeper

Digitized by Google

kind — viz., the knowledge that interprets the laws of human nature, or comprehends the prevailing sentiment of an age and people — as the seamanship of an accomplished member of the Yacht Club is distinguished from the science of a cosmographer or the skill of an admiral. Still this knowledge of the world is not to be disparaged. There is much to envy in the brilliant owner of a yacht admirably managed and elegantly equipped; and it is not every man who has the audacious ambition to measure the waves as a Scoresby, or to rule them as a Nelson.

No common rank in social consideration is enjoyed by him who, without pretending to any other rare gifts or acquirements, possesses in high degree knowledge of the world, and the exquisite tact which is its usual concomitant. And if such knowledge be the polished addition to deeper wisdom and nobler characteristics, it will serve to render genius more consummate and virtue more alluring.

Much, it is true, has been said, in the way of satire, to depreciate, nay, even to vilify and hold up to ascetic scorn, that type of urban idiosyncrasies which is called emphatically "The Man of the World." The man of the world appears sufficiently odious in Macklin's play and Mackenzie's novel; but knowledge of the world, like any other knowledge, does not of itself necessitate participation in the follies and vices of which it is cognisant. A man of the world is not necessarily a knave because the world contains knaves, any more than he is necessarily a fool because the world contains fools. There are many more fools in the world than there are knaves, otherwise the knaves could not exist; yet the man of the world even in Mackenzie and Macklin

Digitized by Google

is certainly no fool. A physician may be familiarly acquainted with diseases, yet himself be healthy; a lawyer may see through all the devices of rogues, yet himself be honest; and so a man of the world may be thoroughly aware of the world's infirmities, and thoroughly up to the world's tricks, without being himself either a Mareschal de Richelieu or a Jonathan Wild. Indeed, the legitimate result of knowledge of the world should tend to make us, on the whole, somewhat better, because somewhat juster, and being juster, somewhat kinder, than we were in those days of inexperienced presumption, when youth is inclined to be the vehement censor of such vices as it is not tempted to commit, and the flippant satirist of such virtues as it is not allured to imitate. In fact, just as it may be years before we discover the better qualities of any man, while his foibles strike us at the first glance, so it is with that aggregate of men which we call the world. Lord Melbourne, who in earlier life was somewhat predisposed towards cynical views of the world's standard of morality, said, after quitting office, "I am glad to have been First Minister, for I found that men are much better, much more honourable and sincere, than I had supposed them to be when I was in opposition." Certainly he knows very little of the world we live in nowadays, who does not become more indulgent and charitable than he was when he first started into life. And he is led into such charity and indulgence after undergoing many melancholy deceptions, and perhaps writhing under some grievous wrongs, by discovering that a man may be wise in spite of his foibles, and good in spite of his errors; that it is very rarely we find a dull man without his clever points, or

Digitized by Google

a bad man without some redeeming virtue. On the other hand, greatness and goodness of a really high and noble order become more visibly great and good the more they are examined by a man who, having in himself something of great or good, can measure their proportions in the universe he inhabits with the accuracy which can only be attained by a practised eye. Stars are all small to the infant and the clown: it is the philosopher who astonishes us by the information of their magnitude. It is true that a hero may not be a hero to his *valet-de-chambre*. "Of course not," says Goethe, "for a man must be a hero to understand a hero. The valet, I daresay, would have a great respect for some man who had a superior stamp as valet." "But what," asks some juvenile Timon — "what can palliate the blackness of the perfidies which have blighted into lasting misanthropy my bloom of life?" — meaning the mournful interval between twenty-one and twenty-three. Certainly, O generous Timon, it is probable that at twenty-one you may have already found in your friend a hawk who regards you as a pigeon, and in your sweetheart an angel in nothing except the wings which have borne her away from your arms. But, granting all the infamy of those in whom, with the fondness of youth, you invested your belief in human virtue, still, if you look round, even to that limited circumference in life which your practical survey can command, all human beings have not proved themselves monsters. Perhaps your father was not altogether a rogue; perhaps your mother had some lovable quality; perhaps your little sister now and then kissed you disinterestedly; perhaps all the boys at your school were not thieves and liars. You have

Digitized by Google

chanced — as we all chance, sooner or later, in going through life — on some person, male or female, who behaved very ill to you; an excellent reason for being a little more cautious whom you trust in future — no reason at all for trusting nobody. Live on, and, unless you are an incorrigible simpleton, you will find that in such society as a man of honour familiarly frequents, where he meets with one knave and traitor he meets with a hundred gentlemen as upright and loyal as himself. Nay, live on, and you will acknowledge a truth, of which, at this moment of anger, you are still more scornfully incredulous — those monsters who have behaved so atrociously to you, may in other relations of life be estimable. The parasites at whose heads Timon flung the dishes before he rushed off to his cave in the woods, had doubtless some finer trait of humanity than that of being parasites to Timon. Of those "Lords," how do we know that the first Lord was not an excellent father and husband; the second Lord a gallant warrior; the third Lord an useful member of the Areopagus?

In short, I suspect that every really skilled man of the world — as the world exists for its citizens in this nineteenth century — who, at the ripe age of forty, looks from the window of his club on the everyday mortals whom Fourier has hitherto failed to reform, has convinced himself that, considering all the mistakes in our education and rearing — all the temptations to which flesh and blood are exposed — all the trials which poverty inflicts on the poor — all the seductions which wealth whispers to the rich — men, on the whole, are rather good than otherwise, and women, on the whole, are rather better than the men.

Digitized by Google

I say "as the world exists in this nineteenth century," because it seems to me that knowledge of the world means a very different thing in one age to what it means in another. There have been times when, on the surface of society, all was putrid and loathsome; and though a knowledge of that abominable scum might have been purely scientific, and though he who knew it best might have abhorred it most, yet knowledge of the world in those days must have been, to an unvitiated taste, bitter as a draught from Marah; and any knowledge that keeps us in a perpetual state of wrath and scorn can scarcely improve our tempers or amend our hearts. Juvenal seems to have had a passably full knowledge of the world of his day, and was, we may fairly presume, conscientiously scandalised by the corruption which furnished the themes to his satire; but I very much doubt if he were made a whit better by all the stormy indignation to which the knowledge of so naughty a world transported his vehement genius. *Ridet et odit* — he laughs and hates; but the laugh of hatred is not a habit which a moralist can indulge with safety to his own moral nature. And probably Juvenal would have maintained himself in a more genuinely ethical state of mind — have been pleasanter to his friends, kinder to his slaves — have burned with more pious devotion his incense to Jove — if he had known a little less of the great world of Rome, and, when tired of its din and its smoke, sought refuge, like Horace, in Sabine shades by Bandusian founts.

If a good man find that his knowledge of the world supplies no other food to his genius than the laugh of hate, let him leave to itself the world, which

Digitized by Google

he can never improve by the mere process of railing. Is it so odious? Well, he is not compelled to live in it. If he be a philosopher, he carries with him a world of his own at the sole of his foot. There never yet has been a period in history when a man so clever as Juvenal could not have been good if he pleased, no matter how wicked all other folks were. But a man certainly cannot be very good if he be always in a rage — even with the folks who are bad. In fine,

> "When grief and anger in the bosom swell,
> *Let* injured Thales bid the town farewell."

But the world of our day is not the world of Juvenal — no, nor the world of Tacitus nor Petronius (assuming, for the moment, that the Petronius Arbiter of Tacitus wrote that novel of manners which scholars generally agree that he did not write, but which was certainly written by some very clever man of the world when the world was still the Roman empire); no, nor is the world of our day the world of St. Simon, of Rochefoucauld, of Horace Walpole.

The Duc de St. Simon is partly the Tacitus, partly the Juvenal, of the old French regime. Of his style it may be said, as it was of Tertullian's, that "it is like ebony, at once dark and splendid." He stands amidst the decay of a perishing social system. The thorough rot of the old regime is clear to his sanctimonious and solemn eye, through the cracks of the satin-wood which veneers its worm-eaten substance and bungled joinery. I am far from saying that men, on the whole, were rather good than otherwise, and women, on the whole, rather better than the men, in the world which St. Simon knew; but his world was very contracted. His personal vanity served to contract it still

Digitized by Google

more. Marmontel said of him, "that all which he saw in the nation was the *noblesse;* all that he saw in the *noblesse* was the peerage; and all that he saw in the peerage was himself" — an exaggerated judgment, as definitions of character condensed into sarcasms usually are, but not without a large foundation of truth. The world of a court is not a fair sample even of that mere superficies of concrete existence to which I proposed limiting our survey of what is called knowledge of the world; much less the court of an absolute monarchy. To use the Duc's own expression, no man had keener penetration than he into "*le manége des courtisans.*" But courtiers are not the people; the life of a court is not the life of a nation: it is to the nation's life what a sucker grafted on a stem is to the tree which has its roots in the soil; the flowers and fruits which it yields are those of the sucker, and not of the tree. But to the success of all grafting, these conditions are indispensable: first, that the place of juncture should be guarded from the air; secondly, that the graft should have a perfect similitude with the plant from which its nourishment is derived, in the grain of the wood, the consistency of the bark, the season for the sap. Where these conditions fail, it is a proof of the gardener's ignorance, and not of his knowledge, if, showing me a blighted quince, he tells me it is a proof of disease in the native tree — it is only a proof of disease in the alien sucker. Now, there was no similitude in bark or in wood between the courtier of Versailles and the genuine autochthon of France — the sap of the one had no natural confluence with the sap of the other: and the clay rudely plastered round the point of junction was, in the time of St. Simon, fast

Digitized by Google

crumbling away, to let in, with each beam of obtrusive sunlight, the air that must kill not the tree but the graft. It is the characteristic of St. Simon, and of many other French memoir-writers less gifted, to imagine that, in showing the sickliness of the graft, they are proving the condition of the tree. They treat of the *grand monde;* but their *grand monde* is only the face of the *beau monde*, with bloom that comes not from the veins, but from carmine and pearl powder.

This defect of scope detracts from the merit of an observer still more subtle and keen than St. Simon. Rochefoucauld reduces to the dimensions of drawing-room epigram the range of a philosophy intended to illustrate the mechanism of Man by a morality drawn from the knowledge of Manners. His maxims are exquisite specimens of that kind of wisdom which might be attained in boudoirs and *petits soupers* by a French duke of brilliant wit, of sharp penetration — adorned by a style that, for neatness and finish, might have been written by Alcibiades, amusing his exile in Sparta by refining Laconic aphorisms into Attic diction.

Yet, while Rochefoucauld has no claim to original conception in the Epicurean theory tracing all the springs of our actions, good or evil, sublime or base, to that self-love of which the 'Maxims' are designed to be the brilliant Euclid, the propositions by which he illustrates his doctrine are based on experiences visibly narrow. One perceives at a glance that Rochefoucauld's men, who "in the adversity of their best friends always find something that does not displease them," were hollow-hearted intriguants for fortune, place, and favour; men who, even in the heat of civil war (the war of the Fronde) seem devoid of one pa-

Digitized by Google

triotic sentiment, or of one ennobling opinion. Even the great Condé takes arms with the foreigner against his own country, from no conceivable motive except that he had not been treated with all the *égards* due to him at court. In such a camp as that of the Fronde, in such a court as that of France, I have no doubt that men found something not displeasing to them in the adversities of their best friends. Those men had been accustomed from childhood to think very little of their best friends where their own interests were concerned. So, when Rochefoucauld says that "there are few virtuous women who are not tired of their *métier*," I have no doubt that the saying was true as applied to the French marchionesses, to whom virtue was a *métier*. Aphorisms like these, applied to humankind in general, are only sarcasms having just that proportion of partial truth to which sarcasm is indebted for its sparkle. Nothing conveys a more inaccurate idea of a whole truth than a part of a truth so prominently brought forth as to throw the other parts into shadow. This is the art of caricature; and by the happy use of that art you might caricature the Apollo Belvidere.

To appreciate the process of thought by which Rochefoucauld arrives at his famous maxim of our secret content in the adversities of our best friends, it is necessary to glance at some of his opinions on friendship in general — as, for instance, "That which men have named friendship is only a society, a reciprocal management of interests, and an exchange of good offices: it is, in fine, only a commerce wherein self-love always proposes to itself a something to gain." Again, "It is difficult to love those whom we do not esteem, but it is not less so to love those whom we

Digitized by Google

esteem much more than ourselves." Or, "We have always sufficient strength to bear the ills — of another."

Maxims thus cynical, set forth after deliberate meditation, and so carefully weighed, so laboriously polished, that every word has been a study, must either be congenial to the nature of the writer or to the social experiences from which he has drawn them; but they were not congenial to the nature of Rochefoucauld, who was esteemed, by the best judges among his contemporaries, for the chivalrous honour of his character; and therefore it is in such maxims that we see not the writer, not mankind in general, but the social attributes of the time and circle in which he lived. There are few things that more intelligibly depict the condition of any given state of society than the estimate taken of those affections of love and friendship which are the cement of all societies — but may in one age be a cement of cracking rubble or crumbling mud, and, in another age, of Parian stone.

In healthful — that is, in free — communities, there are certain public friendships in which the types of private friendship appear heroic; and, from the disinterested nature of the public friendships, private friendships insensibly acquire generosity and elevation. Certainly, in those public friendships, there is nothing that pleases men in the adversities of their best friends; for the common sympathy in great objects overpowers the egotism which either soothes a latent envy, or indulges a vain sentiment of superiority in such pleasure as can be found in contemplating the misfortunes of a friend. Shaftesbury has thus noted, among the counterpoising benefits to the evils of war, the magnanimity

Digitized by Google

of the friendships which are engendered by the participation of a common peril and a common glory. It is so, if the combatants feel something sacred in the cause of the war which unites them — not if the war be a mere game of personal ambition, in which the death of your best friend may be a lucky step in your promotion. Thus, the combatant, in some war hallowed by the conviction of his conscience, and espoused by the passions of his heart, far from finding it difficult, according to Rochefoucauld's maxim, to love those whom he esteems more than himself, loves his chief exactly in proportion as he accords to that chief an esteem in which the sense of his own personality absolutely vanishes. As man must personify in flesh and blood his abstract idea of love and veneration, so the patriot soldier invests the strongest affections of his heart in some heroic chief, who seems to him most livingly to represent whatever is most divine in his enthusiastic thought. In no adversity that could befall that chief would there be a something that would not displease him. No genuine Ironside could have known any secret satisfaction had reverse befallen Cromwell — no genuine Cavalier have felt a consolatory touch of self-love when the pikemen smoked in the face of Charles. To both the Ironside and the Cavalier, the man who concentred on himself for the time the noblest affections of human friendship, was the representative of a cause — was a Cromwell or a Charles. "Yes," you will say, "but this is not friendship — it is something more and something different. It was not friendship that the Ironside felt for Cromwell, or the Cavalier for Charles." Granted; but in all which elevates and ennobles friendship into a relation beyond mere com-

Digitized by Google

panionship, which identifies the Friend with some agency in the success of a principle that we hold to be a paramount truth — a principle that takes us literally and completely out of all cognition of our self-love, and of all which common-sense can accept as our self-interest — there enters an affection which is, more or less, like that of an enthusiast for the representative of his cause. And this comprehends the secret of that affectionate friendship which, in free States, springs up between members of the same party; so that, where party runs strong, Cicero's saying is almost painfully true, "*Idem sentire de Republica ea sola firma amicitia est*" — an aphorism which, transferred from classic Latin into homely English, means, "Sympathy in political opinions constitutes the only firm friendship." Party-spirit in our day does not run so high as it did in Cicero's — in our day we must qualify the maxim. In our day, to my judgment, a safe English politician should be many-sided, not one-sided: he should live familiarly with all classes of opinion; he should weigh deliberately and muse reflectively over all that is generous and true and wise in each class. I am not sure whether, in metaphysics, the eclectic school, adorned by the candid genius of Victor Cousin, be the deepest; but I am sure that, for the practical administration of England, the eclectic statesman will obtain the largest amount of confidence, and do the greatest amount of good. Moreover, in England, thank heaven, we are not at this moment so engrossingly politicians but what we have other fellowships besides those of politics — Literature, Art, Science — even congenialities in ordinary social tastes or sympathies, in manners and modes of living. Happy for a land is that time in which political dis-

Digitized by Google

sensions are not the tyrannical controllers of man's intellectual, moral, spiritual being!

But party is still a noble fellowship, if it be nobly adopted; — a noble intercommunication of affection and thought: and the friendships formed by the large sympathies of party are still strong enough to give a polite contradiction to Rochefoucauld's axiom. True, in party as in literature, art, trade, there are base jealousies. Let a member of either House of Parliament, full of himself — full of the *amour propre* which Rochefoucauld so anatomically dissects — consult only his egotism; desire, if young, to shine by an oratorical display — desire, if old and hardened, to betray a colleague and indulge a spleen: certes, if he fail, in his adversity there will be something which will not displease his right honourable and noble friends. But once let a man merge his personality, however brilliant that be, in an earnest consideration of what is best for the party and the cause to which he belongs — real earnestness is so evident that it seldom admits denial in any large assembly in which the earnest speaker lifts up his truthful brow — and that man will have friends to whom his failure, or misfortunes involving failure, would convey nothing that could not displease. Those whom the misfortune does not displease will not be his friends, but his antagonists. Mr. Pitt was popularly considered a man in whom private friendships were somewhat frigid; but when his friend Lorl Melville was stricken down by a sentence of impeachment, tears, for the first time, were detected in Pitt's haughty eyes; and the shock, to a heart indomitable to foes, contributed to the causes which accelerated his death. There was not

Digitized by Google

a something in Lord Melville's adversity which did not displease Mr. Pitt. Nor was the afflicted friend here the object of a hero-worship to which the worshipper renders superstitious adoration. Melville might worship Pitt — Pitt did not worship Melville. In loyal, affectionate friendship, I know not which is the stronger tie to a loyal affectionate nature — gratitude for him who serves you, or appreciation of gratitude in him whom you have served. On the whole, in proportion to the heroism of your nature, you will most devotedly sacrifice yourself to the man who has served you, and may nevertheless most fondly mourn for the misfortunes of the man whom you have had the happiness to serve; but in neither case can you find, in the misfortunes of benefactor or benefited, a something that does not displease you. Where men do feel such satisfaction in the adversities of their best friends as to justify Rochefoucauld's maxim, and lift it into the popularity of a proverb, there must be a rot in the state of society; and the cynicism of the saying condemns not the man who says it, but the society that originated illustrations so numerous as to make the saying proverbial. As I have before said, Rochefoucauld's character warrants this reflection. The author of the 'Maxims' was apparently the least selfish public man of his land and age. Saith one of his biographers, not untruly, "He gave the example of all the virtues of which he would appear to contest the existence." He ridicules bravery as a madness; and as Madame de Maintenon, who could have had no predilection for his system, curtly observes, "*il etoit cependant fort brave.*" The proofs of his bravery do not rest on Madame de Maintenon's assertion. A scorn of danger, pre-eminently French,

Digitized by Google

as it became the inheritor of so great a French name to exhibit, was sufficiently shown at the siege of Bordeaux and the battle of St. Antoine. Madame de Sevigné speaks of Rochefoucauld with an admiration which she rarely bestows except on her daughter; and says that, in his last agonising illness, he thought more of his neighbour than himself. Cardinal de Retz, in the portrait he has left of the brilliant duke — a portrait certainly not flattered — tells us that this philosopher, who reduced all human motives to self-interest, did not feel (*il ne sentoit pas*) the little interests which have never been his weak point (*son foible*), and did not understand the great interests (*il ne connoissoit pas les grands*) which have not been his strong point (*son fort*); and, finally, this acute critic of contemporaneous celebrities, after assuring us that Rochefoucauld "had never been a good party-man," tells us that, in the relations of common life, Rochefoucauld was the honestest man of his age (*le plus honnête homme à l'égard de la vie commune qui eût paru dans son siècle*). And yet, though Rochefoucauld was not depraved by the world in which he lived, we may reasonably doubt if he would not have been a still better man if his knowledge of it had been somewhat less intimate. He tells us, for instance, that he was insensible to compassion. Would he have been so insensible to compassion if he had not somewhat hardened his own heart by the process of dissecting, with scientific remorselessness, the mean little hearts which furnish the subjects of his lectures on mankind? If some skilful vivisector has spent the morning in disjointing and disembowelling the curs that he submits to his philosophical scalpel, one can scarcely expect him to be seized with compassion for a hungry mastiff

Digitized by Google

or a footsore pointer whom he may encounter in his evening walks.

I must crave pardon for treating at such length of the author of the 'Maxims,' and of the fallacies contained in his theory. The pardon is due to me; for we are never to forget the extent to which the fashionable philosophy of France has operated on the intellect and action of Europe; and Voltaire assures us, in his most elaborate work, that "the book which most contributed to form the taste of the French nation was the 'Maxims' of François, Duc de Rochefoucauld." That is true; — not only the taste but the mode of thought. Helvetius, preceding the Revolution, is but a learned and lengthened expositor of the philosophy contained in the 'Maxims.' Rochefoucauld was one of the founders of the Revolution, for his work was that of a leveller. His descendant, like himself a philosopher, accepted the Revolution, cheerfully renounced his titles of noblesse, and was appointed to the Presidency of the Department of Paris. It is easy to resign the titles of a duke — difficult to get rid of the honour of a gentleman. Quoth one of the patriots with whom he linked himself, "This *ci-devant* is of a virtue too troublesome" (*c'est une vertu trop incommode*). Accordingly, the descendant of the author of the 'Maxims' was doomed, and massacred in the sight, almost in the arms, of his wife and mother; — tragic and practical illustration of the dogma which the great Duke had impressed on the mind of his country; — "*Les vertus se perdent dans l'intérêt, comme les fleuves se perdent dans la mer.*" Certainly it is not in the 'Maxims' of Rochefoucauld that we would search for doctrines which make chivalry poetically heroic and democracy poetically humane.

Digitized by Google

When Alphonse Lamartine, by an immortal speech, in which there is no wit and no sparkle, struck down to his feet the red flag, we recognise intuitively the difference between the maxim-maker's knowledge of the conventional world and the poet-orator's knowledge of the universal human heart. Honour to Alphonse Lamartine for his knowledge of the heart in that moment which saved the dignity of France and the peace of Europe, no matter what were his defects in the knowledge of the world — defects by which rulers destined to replace him learned to profit! Honour to that one triumph of poetry put into action!

I have spoken of Knowledge of the World, in the current meaning of the phrase, as superficial — the knowledge of a society which is to the world what the surface is to the sea. But that definition is not always correct; for knowledge of the world in Rochefoucauld, and writers akin to him, even including La Bruyère (who, like all plagiarists of real genius, has rendered original what he plagiarised, and, copying from the skeleton-outlines of Theophrastus, has made the copy worth a million times more than the picture it honours by copying) — knowledge of the world in Rochefoucauld and La Bruyère is knowledge that cannot be called shallow — it wants breadth rather than depth. In proportion to its width it is profound. It does not skim over the sea; but it does fathom to the base of the cistern, and does ascend to the height of the spray, in an artificial fountain. On the other hand, our own Horace Walpole's knowledge of the world is much more expansive than that of St. Simon or Rochefoucauld, and is much less deep in proportion

Digitized by Google

to its width. It takes a more varied survey of manners and humours, embracing more of the active and serious employments of that life which is not spent in patrician salons and royal anterooms. It sports, indeed, with the appropriate airiness of a well-born wit, over the fragile characters of its Lady Betties and Lord Jessamies; it has its familiar *entrée* into the circle set apart for princes of the blood: but it is at home in a world on the other side of the Coteries; it has a polite acquaintance with the arts which embellish our universal humanity; it has its familiar chit-chat with the grave interests and the solemn passions by whose alternate action and repulsion Freedom maintains its poise; it comprehends the truth as notable in political as in physical science — viz., that large bodies attract the smaller, and by the smaller are themselves attracted. Horace Walpole illustrates his knowledge of the world by anecdote and witticism, by the authority of his own empirical opinion, by a fancy so wanton and discursive that it cannot fail to be sometimes just; but he never fatigues himself by seeking, like Rochefoucauld, to dissect and analyse. He prides himself on being frivolous, and if he is wise, he takes care to tell you that he is only so for his own amusement. We cannot dispute his knowledge of the world in breadth of surface, as we may do that of the French Court-philosophers; but he very rarely dives to the depth which they explore, though it be but the depth of a garden fountain. Not actuated by any earnest desire of abstract truth in his survey of things, he is not likely to be scrupulously accurate in his delineations of persons; and in these his native penetration and his acquired experience are often warped and distorted by spite,

Digitized by Google

spleen, party antipathies, family grudges, and still more often by the love of scandal, which is the normal characteristic of an intellectual gossip. We cannot look on his portraitures of contemporaneous characters even with the qualified respect which we attach to those in the Memoirs of St. Simon. They do not belong to a historical gallery; but they have their price as a portfolio of brilliant caricatures by an artist who might have done much better. Finally, we may doubt whether Horace Walpole's knowledge of the world conduced to his own moral wellbeing; whether if, in youth, he had immured himself in a college, like Gray — devoted himself, like Gray, to earnest study, and the patient contemplation of those forms of art which, as a fashionable virtuoso, he only deigned to regard as toys for rococo cabinets — he might not have disciplined his unquestionable genius to much nobler exercise, and cultivated into richer fertility those manly affections of which he proved, by his friendship for Conway, and his reverence for his father's memory, that he was not constitutionally barren. Remote from the world that he paints in such brilliant water-colours, he might have filled his heart and his mind with less old-maidish fondnesses than he conceived, amid swarms of human fellow-creatures, for a long-haired poodle and a Gothic reliquary.

Knowledge of the world, in the conventional sense which is given to the phrase, is rarely exhibited by poets, either in their writings or their lives. It is only intellects of a much higher order than suffices for those combinations of melodious sound, delicate fancies, or tender sentiments, by which poets can achieve lovely and immortal names — that seize and cultivate into

Digitized by Google

fruit or flower such germs of poetry as lie deep-hidden beneath the trodden soils of commonplace and matter-of-fact. Knowledge of the world, as a man of the world comprehends it, does in itself belong rather to the prose than to the poetry of life. There seems, indeed, to most poets, something antagonistic to poetic fancies, reveries, and contemplations, in the study of conventional manners — in the intimate acquaintance with the fashions and frivolities of the Court and the Town — in the analysis of the ordinary motives of prosaic characters — in the business of their idleness, the idleness of their business. It is only a poet of immense grasp and range that, seizing on all these material elements of earth, carries them aloft into his upper air, held there in solution, as the atmosphere above us holds the metals and the gases, and calling them forth at his easy will, to become tangible and visible, through luminous golden vapour; as, at the magic of the chemist, gases burst into light from the viewless space; or, in a ray of the sun, are discovered the copper and the iron which minister to our most familiar uses.

It is certainly not the least marvellous property of Shakespeare's genius that he takes up into his poetry elements that seem essentially to belong to prose, and gives them back in poetic forms, yet preserving all the practical value which plain good sense could give them in prose the most logically severe. In his aphorisms, he includes the worldly shrewdness, the fine observation of positive life, of conventional manners, which constitute the merit of the Rochefoucaulds, La Bruyères, Walpoles. Nothing can be less like their prose than his poetry; but his poetry embraces the happiest particles of the genius which

Digitized by Google

places their prose among our classics. In the wide range of his characters he comprises the airy, fine gentleman, the subtle politician, the courtier, the fop — the types of those in whom the man of the world recognises the familiars from whom he derives his experience. What knowledge of the world — unsurpassed by those who are its oracles of our own day in the clubs of London and Paris — playfully blazes out in his Falstaff, his Mercutio! With what delicate and finished mastery of character, formed by the influence of the actual world, the hypocrisy of Angelo is shadowed forth and reconciled to the qualities that had made him tenacious of repute for inflexible justice and rigid virtue! Compare Shakespeare's Angelo with Molière's Tartuffe — both admirable portraitures; but the first is the portraiture by a psychologist, the second the portraiture by a satirist. There is no satire in Angelo — very little satire in Shakespeare's habitual employment of his genius; for satire is, in reality, too akin to prose views of life for Shakespeare's transmutation of prose into poetry. But whatever satire aims at in the Tartuffe is included and fused in the conception of Angelo; and so it is with Shakespeare generally. As satire consists in the exaggeration of some alleged vice or folly, to the ignoring of other components in the moral being of the individual satirised, until the individual is reduced almost to an abstraction of the idea which the satirist wishes to hold up to scorn, and a Tartuffe becomes less a hypocritical man than an allegoric personification of hypocrisy; so, on the contrary, with Shakespeare, the one dominant passion, humour, or moral quality of the character is generally softened and shaded off into various other tints; and it

Digitized by Google

is through the entire system and complicated functions of the living man that the dominating idea winds and undulates — a living man, and not an automaton which an ingenious mechanician sets in movement for the purpose of exhibiting a philosophical idea that he desires to make scientifically clear to vulgar comprehension. It is for this reason that Shakespeare, in his tragedy, so remarkably preserves the intellectual freedom of his criminal characters. As Hegel well remarks, it is not the witches who lead Macbeth on to his crimes — it is the sinful desires to which the witches only give an utterance that at first dismays him; and it is also for this reason that Shakespeare is so genial in his comedy, and, being so genial, so exquisitely forgiving. That he should not only let off, but actually reward, an Angelo, is a violation of the vulgar laws of poetical justice. But Shakespeare's sovereign knowledge of the world, instead of making him cynical and austere, makes him charitable and gentle. Perhaps because he lived in a very grand age, in which, amid much that, while human nature lasts, will be eternally bad and low, there were, nevertheless, astir all the noblest elements which modern society has called into play. There was still the valiant spirit of chivalry, divested of its savage rudeness, retaining its romantic love of adventure, its unselfish loyalty, its ineffable dignity, its poetic delicacy of sentiment and high-bred courtesy of bearing. Shakespeare was the contemporary of Spenser. But there was also astir in the world — not yet divorced from the courtly graces, not yet narrowed into puritanical fanaticism — the sublime conception of a freedom for opinion and conscience, destined to create a heroism

Digitized by Google

more intense and more earnest than knighthood's. Shakespeare's 'Tempest' was the precursor of Milton's 'Comus.' Shakespeare had not only the advantage of living in a very great and energetic age, but the still greater advantage, for the serene and angerless contemplation of human infirmities, of living in an age in which the conflicting passions between the old and the new heroisms of thought were not yet let loose, — when men, in their zeal for a cause or a principle, were not inflamed into a hate that destroyed all philosophical judgment of the men who differed from them. It was not only a great age, but a conciliatory age; and Shakespeare, in expressing it, is as conciliatory as he is great. This was impossible to the Poet of that after age, also great, but violently aggressive and antagonistic, which

"Was with its stored thunder labouring up."

Who could have divined in the beautiful dreamy youth of Milton the destined champion of fanatics to whom the Muses and the Graces were daughters of Belial? — who could have supposed that out of such golden platonisms, such lovely fancies, such dulcet concords of all pastoral, chivalrous, courtly, scholastic melodies, as meet and ravish us away from each ungentle thought in 'Comus' and 'L'Allegro,' 'Il Penseroso,' 'Lycidas,' 'Arcadia,' would rise the inflexible wrathful genius that became the vindicator of Charles's regicide, the eulogist of Cromwell's usurpation? Happy that, surviving the age of strife, that majestic spirit is last seen on earth, nearer in age than even in youth to the gates of heaven, and, no longer fiercest in the war of Christian against Christian, blending all the poetries of Christendom itself in that wondrous hymn, compared

Digitized by Google

to which Tasso's song is but a dainty lay, and even Dante's verse but a Gothic mystery.

To return to Shakespeare. In that world which he knew so well, there were not only the Spensers, the Sidneys, the Raleighs, and the magnificent image of Elizabeth crowning all, and, to the infinite disgrace of Englishmen, of late years deposed from her throne of Gloriana, and reduced by small historians and shallow critics to the level of a Catherine of Russia; — there was also the Francis Bacon who revolutionised all the systems of practical science; and, far less known (be that also to the shame of Englishmen), the John Davies, beyond whom no metaphysician of the immaterial or spiritual school, — including its great reformers, the Scotch, with Reid — its æsthetic embellishers and logicians, with Kant — its accomplished, rhetorical, eloquent embellishers, with Victor Cousin, — has advanced, any more than Faraday, Frankhofer, Stokes, Brewster, Kirchhoff have advanced from Newton, in tracing the nature of the solar light. Contemporaneous with Shakespeare, also, were those awful politicians — far, indeed, from being scrupulously philanthropical, far from being morally spotless — Walsingham and either Cecil; but who, in practical statesmanship, who, in the knowledge of which Themistocles boasted — "the knowledge how to make small states great" — towered aloft over even a Raleigh and a Bacon. It is by the light of such an age that we can alone read adequately a Shakespeare, who, in his mere playful supererogatory knowledge of the world, comprehended them all, and fused, in his loving verse, every discord in their various wisdom.

What has most struck me in comparing, I do not

Digitized by Google

say Shakespeare's genius, for that is incomparable, but his practical wisdom, with the poets of his time, has been less his metaphysical depth and subtlety in discovering some latent truth amid the complicated folds of the human mind, than the ease with which he adapts his metaphysical acuteness to his practical views of life; in short, his knowledge of man individually, wondrous as it is, seems to me less exclusively and transcendently his own than his combination of knowledge of men individually, and of the world collectively, and his fusion of both kinds of knowledge into poetic form, which has its appropriate place in the entire composition, and is not merely a detached and occasional felicity of diction; for if we look at his contemporaries, and especially the later ones, there are few attributes they have more in common than a love for metaphysical reflection upon man in the abstract, couched in vivid poetry of expression. Passages of this kind abound in Beaumont and Fletcher; still more in the richer genius of Massinger, whose main fault, perhaps, lies in an over-fondness for metaphysical research in the creation of exceptional characters influenced by exceptional motives, and a lavish beauty of expression, which is often inharmonious to the displeasing nature of the action. This family resemblance is perhaps less salient in Jonson than in the other great dramatists of the time; but even in him it is sufficiently strong. The prevalent taste in the age of a great writer who may be regarded as its highest type, is perhaps, however, best seen in the taste of the younger generation formed in his school, and among writers of the lesser order of genius, which reflects the earlier genius that overshadows it. Daniel, Habington,

Digitized by Google

Davenant have wonderful lines here and there, combining, in the Shakespearean spirit, an abstract philosophical thought with exquisite poetry of form. Such as this description of Justice —

> "Clear-eyed Astræa
> Comes with her balance and her sword, to show
> That first her judgment weighs before it strikes."
> — Daniel's 'Goddesses.'

Or this fine discrimination between political perils —

> "Each small breath
> Disturbs the quiet of poor shallow waters,
> But winds must arm themselves ere the large sea
> Is seen to tremble."
> — Habington's 'Queen of Arragon.'

Or this striking illustration of the fear which accompanies and betokens ardent love —

> "Flame trembles most when it doth highest rise."
> — Sir W. Davenant's 'The Man's the Master.'

Observe the metaphysical depth in the lines I am about to subjoin from May,* and consider how much the thought they embody has served to furnish forth arguments in defence of miracles urged at this day:

> "Nor let us say some things 'gainst Nature be,
> Because such things as those we seldom see.
> We know not what is natural, but call
> Those acts which God does often — natural.
>
> Where, if we weighed with a religious eye
> The *power* of doing — not the *frequency* —
> All things alike in strangeness to our thought
> Would be, which He in the creation wrought;
> But in those rare and wondrous things may we
> The freedom of that great Creator see.

* May was about twenty-one when Shakespeare died. It was the generation preceding his own in which his youth learned to think, and it is the spirit of that epoch of thought which speaks in the verses cited — a spirit that underwent a notable change in the revolutionary epoch during which May's later manhood acted its inconsistent and passionate part.

Digitized by Google

When He at first the course of things ordained,
And Nature within certain bounds restrained,
That laws of seeds and seasons may be known; —
He did not then at all confine His own
Almighty power! But, wheresoe'er He will,
Works 'gainst the common course of Nature still."
— May's 'Henry II.'

I think that every student of intellectual philosophy will allow that there must have been an immense amount of metaphysical, and even of psychological, knowledge afloat in the atmosphere of an age in which so poor a poet, in point of genius and form, as that I have quoted, could embody such refinement and depth of reasoning in verses that certainly are not inspired.

The two writers, in the full noon of the Shakespearean era, to whom we should be least disposed to look for sentences rich in abstract philosophy (always except Spenser, in whom philosophy, where found, as completely forgets its purpose, in allegorical fancies and melodious roundelays, as a bee may forget its hive amid the honeys of Hymettus), are Philip Sidney, the Court darling, and Lilye, the fashionable euphuist. Yet, even in his romance of 'Arcadia,' Sidney has depths and reaches of thought which may suffice to show what tributary rivulets were feeding the sea of Shakespeare. Lilye was pre-eminently the fashionable literary fop of his splendid age; but still Lilye, if he be compared with a fashionable novelist or play-writer of our time, in Paris or London, becomes instantly entitled to a considerable degree of respect. The 'Euphues' devoured by courtiers and maids of honour is enough to show how high a standard of intellectual eminence was required by the most frivolous portion of the reading public of that majestic day. Its per-

Digitized by Google

vading vice is, that it pushes into extravagant caricature Shakespeare's own greatest fault — viz. , the excess of wit in verbal conceit; but strip the sense of that verbal conceit, and the substance left is robust and masculine. It abounds with materials for fine thinking, in spite of a style so opposed to good writing; and that a work in which a schoolman's erudition is employed in selecting the pithy sayings and subtle conjectures of ancient philosophers should have become the rage with light readers of fashion, is a proof how much the taste for philosophising had become the taste of the age.

In Shakespeare's day, then, the tendency to science and metaphysical speculation was marked and general, and his own fondness for it is explained by the spirit of his time. But he stands distinct from contemporaneous writers of imagination in this — that his science of man's nature in the abstract is so wondrously enriched and vivified by knowledge of the world — exhibited not only in profound aphorisms, but in vivid impersonations through created characters in every class and grade of life; and of the latter knowledge there is very little trace in his contemporaries — very little trace, I venture to think, even in Jonson and Beaumont and Fletcher. Probably his personal intimacies assisted to the perfection of his delineations of the manners and mind of the being we call gentleman — of a Bassanio, a Gratiano, a Benedick, an Orlando, a Mercutio, &c.; not to speak of the incomparable art with which he retains to Falstaff, in despite of all the fat knight's rogueries, the character of the wit who has equality with princes. Falstaff is never vulgar. And if Shakespeare, when not dealing with the destinies of tragedy,

Digitized by Google

is so indulgent to his faulty characters, — not only to Angelo, the sanctimonious dissembler, but to Bertram, the faithless lover — Oliver, the unnatural elder brother — Proteus, the treacherous friend, — it is because his knowledge of the world, in its survey of mankind on the whole, softens into an artistic charity the penetration with which he detects the vice of man in the abstract. And, doubtless, I say, the age in which he lived contributed to engender and justify this charity of judgment. For in its juncture between the licence of chivalric manners and the severer morality which the Reformation and the new-born study of the sacred writings were destined to introduce, and in the struggle visible among the highest natures of the time and land between the old Northern principle of honour, and the seductive brilliancies of Italian craft — there *was*, in the characters of men of the world, a singular mixture of qualities fair and noble and qualities foul and mean, the mixture being sustained by a third element of intellectual activity or poetic grace. Without entering into the controversy as to the just estimate of Lord Bacon's character — which, I think, however, is much too harshly depreciated by Lord Macaulay — I content myself with referring to his advice to Lord Essex, in the letter of 4th October 1596, how "to win the Queen," as sufficing to show the extent to which Machiavellian policy was in that day admitted as blameless into English counsel. For certainly Bacon, in that letter, is altogether unconscious that he is recommending a systematic duplicity and simulation unworthy the adoption of a high-minded noble; nor is there any evidence that Essex himself, though he might reject the advice, resented it as dishonourable;

Digitized by Google

yet as certainly there is not a true gentleman nowadays who could receive such a letter from a distinguished friend without a blush for himself and his adviser; for the whole purport of the letter is to recommend this knight and soldier to seem what he is not — to make his very nature a lie. Pretend, pretend, pretend, is the moral of each wily recommendation. He is to pretend to resemble the very men whom both he and his adviser despise: "whereof I have noted you to fly and avoid, in some respect justly, the resemblance or imitation of my Lord Leicester or my Lord Chancellor Hatton; yet I am persuaded, howsoever I wish your lordship as distant as you are from them in points of form, integrity, magnanimity, and merit, that it will do you much good between the Queen and you to *allege them*, *as often as you find occasion*, *for authors and patterns;* for I do not know a readier mean to make her Majesty think you are in the right way."

Again: "Your lordship should never be without some particulars afoot which you should *seem* to pursue with earnestness and affection, and *then let them fall upon taking knowledge of her Majesty's opposition and dislike.*" He is to push this insincerity even into bad faith to his own friends and partisans, "of which (particulars) the weightiest sort may be, if your lordship *offer* to labour on the behalf of some that you favour for some of the places now void, choosing such *a subject as you think her Majesty is like to oppose unto.* And if you will say this is *conjunctum cum aliena injuria*, I will not answer, *Hæc non aliter constabunt;* but I say, commendation from so good a mouth does not peril a man, though you prevail not." A poor salvo to the conscience of a patron for holding out to trustful

Digitized by Google

clients hopes that he knows are false — and a poor satisfaction to the client to receive commendation from the mouth, with the premeditated design to "be let fall" by the hand.

Again: "A less weighty sort of particulars may be the *pretence* of some journeys which, at her Majesty's request, you *might relinquish*. And the lightest sort of particulars, which are yet not to be neglected, are in your habits, apparel, wearings, *gestures*, and the like."

In short, from the greatest to the least "particular," the man is to be one pretence: "You shall *pretend* to be as bookish and contemplative as ever you were. Whereunto I add one expedient more, stronger than all the rest, and for my own confident opinion, void of any prejudice or danger of diminution of your greatness; and that is, the bringing in of some martial man to be of the Council, dealing directly with her Majesty in it, as for her service and your better assistance; *choosing, nevertheless, some person that may be known not to come in against you by any former division.* I judge the fittest to be my Lord Mountjoy or my Lord Willoughby. And if your lordship see deeplier into it than I do, that you would *not have it done in effect, you may serve your turn by the pretence of it, and stay it, nevertheless.*"

Again: "The third impression is of a popular reputation, which, because it is a thing good of itself, being obtained as your lordship obtaineth it — that is, *bonis artibus* — and, besides well governed, is one of the best flowers of your greatness, both present and to come, it would be handled tenderly. The only way is to quench it *verbis*, and not *rebus;* and therefore, to take all occasions to *speak against popularity and popu-*

Digitized by Google

lar courses vehemently, and to tax it in all others — but, nevertheless, to go on in your honourable commonwealth courses as you do."

Now, judged by the morality of our day, we should say that a man following these counsels would be a contemptible hypocrite and a very dangerous citizen. But in an age where Court favour is the first object of political ambition, morality is of a more accommodating temper. To me, this letter to Essex contains the true key to Lord Bacon's character and conduct in matters relating to the world: it is, in its own way, very wise, and in any way it is very mean. It shows where Bacon's knowledge of the world was profound, and also where it ran into perilous shallows beset with rocks and shoals. It explains the rules by which he shaped his own career and sullied his own honour; how he came to rise so high, and to fall so low. It seems also to justify, on the score of wisdom, the meanness of his supplicatory attitude after his fall. I believe his self-humiliation was more a pretence than a reality; that he did for himself what he had recommended to Essex — sought to seem, rather than to be. An abject bearing was the best means to his end, which was to retrieve as far as possible the effects of his reverse. His lowliness was Ambition's ladder. The more he seemed bowed down with penitent shame, the more he converted the wrath even of his enemies into compassion. And the course he adopted in this seeming self-abasement proved its merely worldly sagacity. Step after step he began to re-arise. His fine was released — the rest of his punishment remitted — he reappeared at Court — he was readmitted to the House of Lords — his piteous importunities for his pension

Digitized by Google

were successful — he got from the Government his £1200 a-year. All that his wisdom saw it possible to effect after such a reverse, he effected through the meanness which perhaps was not constitutional with him, but an essential element of that which, in dealings with the world, he conceived to be wisdom. It is not true, as Mr. Basil Montagu and others would have us believe, that he did nothing which the contemporaries who condemned him really thought wrong; but it is also not true that what he did was thought wrong in the codes of that wily Italian school of policy in which Bacon's youth had been trained. In the Cecil Correspondence, men of the greatest name and the purest repute exhibit a laxity of sentiment in what we now call honour, and a servile greediness for what were then called honours, which would not in our time be compatible with dignity of mind and elevation of character. But in that day such contrasts were compatible. Far from being worse or lower types of our kind in the age of Elizabeth than ambition exhibits now, the men of that age may rather be said to have joined meannesses which no ordinary mean man nowadays will avow, with lofty qualities of heart and intellect and courage which no man, ordinarily noble, nowadays can rival. And thus it was that, in analysing the springs of conduct, and sufficiently showing his condemnation of vice in the abstract, Shakespeare so mercifully, in his mixed characters, awards judgment on the outward fate of the offender, and so tenderly merges the hard law of poetic justice into the soft humanity of poetic love — dealing with such characters as if they were indeed his children, and he could not find it in his father's heart to devote to the

Digitized by Google

avenging Furies the erring offspring he had born into the temptations of the world.

It seems to me that, among modern poets, Goethe ranks next to Shakespeare, at however wide an interval, in the combination of abstract, metaphysical speculation, and genial, easy, clement knowledge of the actual world. But this latter knowledge is perhaps even less shown in his dramas, poems, and novels — works, in short, prepared and designed for publication — than in the numerous records which his friends have preserved of his private correspondence and conversations. In the course of these Essays I have frequently quoted his sayings — perhaps somewhat too frequently; but they have been nearly always taken from such personal records — little known to English readers, and not very generally known even to Germans; and there is scarcely a subject connected with the great interests of the world — whether in art, literature, politics, or in the more trivial realm of worldly manners — on which some shrewd, wise, or playful observation of Goethe's does not spontaneously occur to me as pertinent, and throwing a gleam of new light on topics the most trite or familiar. What Goethe himself thought of the world he knew so well, and in which he won so lofty a vantage-ground of survey, is perhaps sufficiently shown in the following remark, which is made with his characteristic union of *naïveté* and irony: "The immorality of the age is a standing topic of complaint with some men; but if any one likes to be moral, I can see nothing in the age to prevent him."

I may add another of his aphorisms, which hints the explanation of his own lenient views of life: "Great

Digitized by Google

talents are essentially conciliatory." And again: "Age makes us tolerant. I never see a fault which I did not myself commit."

Goethe, like Shakespeare, lived in a great and energetic time. His life comprehends that era in the intellectual history of his country which, for sudden, startling, Titan-like development of forces, has no parallel, unless it be in the outbreak of Athenian genius during the century following the Persian war. A language which, though spoken by vast populations in the central heart of Europe, had not hitherto been admitted among the polite tongues of civilised utterance — which the very kings of the Fatherland had banished from their courts — which was ignored by the *literati* of colleges and capitals, as if the Germany which gave to a sovereign the title of the Cæsars was still the savage dwelling-place of the worshippers of Herman; a language thus deemed a barbarous dialect amid the polished tongues of neighbouring populations, suddenly leapt into a rank beside those of Italy, England, France — furnishing poets, dramatists, critics, reviewers, philosophers, scholars, in dazzling and rapid fertility, and becoming henceforth and evermore a crowded storehouse of the massiest ingots of intellectual treasure, and the most finished ornaments of inventive art.

Amid these founders of a national literature, if Goethe be not indeed the earliest, he appears to be so in the eyes of foreigners, because his form is so towering that it obscures the images of his precursors; and his scope was so vast, his acquirements so various, that almost every phase of that intellectual splendour which surrounds him found on one side or other of his

Digitized by Google

genius a luminiferous reflector, giving back the light which it took in. His knowledge of the world was tolerant and mild as Shakespeare's, partly from the greatness of the national epoch in which the world presented itself to his eye, partly from the prosperous fortunes which the world accorded to his taste for the elegance and the dignity of social life; and partly also from his own calm, artistic temperament, which led him, perhaps somewhat overmuch, to regard the vices or virtues of other men as the painter regards the colours which he mingles in his pallet — with passionless study of his own effects of light and shade. This want of indignation for the bad, this want of scorn for the low, this want of enthusiasm for the good, and this want of worship for the heroic, have been much dwelt upon by his adversaries or depreciators; and the charge is not without some foundation when confined to him as artist; but it does not seem just when applied to him as man. When, through his private correspondence and conversation, we approach to his innermost thoughts, we are somewhat startled to discover the extent of his enthusiasm for all that is genuinely lofty, and all, therefore, that is upright, honest, and sincere. It is this respect for a moral beauty and sublimity apart from the artistic, which made him so reverent an admirer of Lessing — this which rendered so cordial his appreciation of the heroic element in Schiller. It was this which made him so hostile to parodies and travesties. "My only reason for hating them," says he, "is because they lower the beautiful, noble, and great, in order that they may annihilate it." It is this which, in spite of his frequent and grave defects in orthodoxy, made him so thoroughly comprehend the religious truth which he

Digitized by Google

has so resolutely expressed. "Art is based on a strong sentiment of religion: it is a profound and mighty earnestness; hence it is so prone to co-operate with religion." Again: "Art is a severe business; most serious when employed in grand and sacred objects. The artist stands higher than art, higher than the object. He uses art for his purposes, and deals with the object after his own fashion."

Goethe dealt with this art after his own fashion — a fashion not to be commended to any one less than Goethe. He says somewhere, "Oeser taught me that the ideal of beauty is simplicity and tranquillity." That maxim is true, but only to a certain extent — viz., so far as affects form or style; and it is only through his smaller poems, and perhaps in his dramas of 'Iphigenia' and 'Tasso,' that Goethe carries out the principle of composition it inculcates. In the works which give him his European celebrity, simplicity and tranquillity are the last qualities we detect. It is not these merits that impress the reading world in 'Werter' and 'Faust.' In truth, ideal beauty not only requires a great deal more than simplicity and tranquillity, but can exist without being either simple or tranquil. The milkmaids whom I now see out of my window are simple and tranquil, but they are certainly not beautiful. But if the tragedy of 'Othello,' as a work of art, is ideally beautiful, which no Englishman can deny, nothing can be less simple than the character of Iago, and Othello himself becomes poetically beautiful in proportion as he ceases to be tranquil. The fact is, that the intellect of poetry requires not simple but very complex thoughts, sentiments, emotions; and the passion of poetry abhors tranquillity. There is, no doubt, a

Digitized by Google

poetry which embodies only the simple and the tranquil, but it is never the highest kind. Poetry is not sculpture; sculpture alone, of all the arts, is highest where the thought it embodies is the most simple, and the passion it addresses, rather than embodies, is the most tranquil. Thus, in sculpture, the Farnese Hercules rests from his labours, and bears in his arms a helpless child; thus the Belvidere Apollo has discharged his deathful arrow, and watches its effect with the calmness of a scorn assured of triumph. But neither of these images could suggest a poem of the highest order — viz., a narrative or a drama; in such poems we must have the struggle of the mind, and the restless history of the passion. But Goethe's art was not dramatic; he himself tells us so, with his characteristic and sublime candour. He tells us truly, that "tragedy deals with contradictions — and to contradictions his genius is opposed;" he adds as truly, that from the philosophical turn of his mind, he "motivates" too much for the stage. That which prevents his attaining, as a dramatist, his native rank as a poet, still more operates against Goethe as a novelist. Regarded solely as a novelist, his earliest novel, 'Werter,' is the only one that has had a marked effect upon his age, and is the only one that will bear favourable comparison with the *chefs-d'œuvre* of France and England. 'Wilhelm Meister' is the work of a much riper mind; but, as a story designed to move popular interest, it as little resembles an artistic novel as 'Comus' or 'Sampson Agonistes' resembles an acted drama. But through all the various phases of Goethe's marvellous intellect there runs an astonishing knowledge of the infirmities of man's nature, and therefore a surpassing knowledge of the world.

Digitized by Google

He cannot, like Shakespeare, lift that knowledge of the world so easily into the realm of poetic beauty as to accord to infirmity its due proportion, and no more. He makes a hero of a Clavijo — Shakespeare would have reduced a Clavijo into a subordinate character; he makes of a Mephistopheles a prince of hell — Shakespeare would have made of Mephistopheles a mocking philosopher of "earth, most earthy." But knowledge of the world in both these mighty intellects was supreme — in both accompanied with profound metaphysical and psychological science — in both represented in exquisite poetical form; and if in this combination Goethe be excelled by Shakespeare, I know not where else, in imaginative literature, we are to look for his superior.

I have said that I think a Juvenal, a Rochefoucauld, a Horace Walpole, were not rendered better and nobler, and therefore wiser men, in the highest sense of the word wisdom, by their intimate knowledge of the world they lived in. This it not to be said of a Shakespeare or a Goethe. They were not satirists nor cynics. They were so indulgent that scarcely a man living dare be as indulgent as they were; and they were indulgent from the same reasons: 1st, The grandeur of the age in which they lived; 2d, The absence of all acrid and arrogant self-love, and of all those pharisaical pretensions to an austerity of excellence high above the average composite of good and evil in ordinary mortals, which grows out of the inordinate admiration for self, or the want of genial sympathy for the infirmities of others, and the charitable consideration of the influence of circumstance upon human conduct.

Digitized by Google

There is a class of writers in poetry and *belles lettres* in which what we call Knowledge of the World is more immediately recognised, because it is more sharply defined, than it is with the two great poets last mentioned. It is less fused in poetic fancy, it is less characterised by metaphysical subtlety, it is less comprehensive in its range, but it has more singleness of effect and transparency of purpose. Of this class, English literature furnishes brilliant types throughout the whole of the eighteenth century. Pope and Addison are conspicuously men of the world in their favourite modes of thought and forms of expression. Like most men of the world, it is in the school of a metropolis that they ground their studies of mankind: the urban life rather than the rural attracts their survey and stimulates their genius. Pope, indeed, is comparatively insipid and commonplace when he is the mere observer of rural nature, or the interpreter of those sentiments and emotions which rural nature excites in its familiar lovers. He is essentially the poet of capitals, and his knowledge of the world, like that of the class of poets among which he is perhaps the prince, is rather to be called knowledge of the town.*

* In the controversy between Bowles and his adversaries as to Pope's standard among poets, each party mistook or misapprehended the doctrine of the other. Campbell, though the briefest, is the best refuter of Bowles — not because he was the best critic or the best poet who answered him, but because he was the best poet among the critics and the best critic among the poets. Mr. Bowles says that "the true poet should have an eye attentive to and familiar with every change of season, every variation of light and shade of nature, every walk, every tree, and every leaf in her secret places. He who has not an eye to observe them, and who cannot with a glance distinguish every hue on their variety, must be so far deficient in one of the essential qualities of a poet."

Now every genuine poet and every sensible critic knows that in writing these sentences Mr. Bowles wrote something very like nonsense.

Digitized by Google

It is thus that, while the most brilliant of all the imitators of Horace, it is only to one side of Horace's genius that Pope courts comparison. Where Horace is the poet of manners, as in the Epistles and Satires, Pope may be said to surpass, in his paraphrases, the originals from which he draws inspiration. In his own Epistles and Satires he has a polish and point, a delicate finish, and an elaborate harmony of verse, which the Latin poet did not consider appropriate to that class of composition, but which the English poet has shown to be embellishing adornments. But Pope can never approach Horace in the other and diviner side of

And whether as poet or critic, Campbell has an easy victory in replying "that this botanising perspicuity might be essential to a Dutch flower-garden, but Sophocles displays no such skill, and yet he is a genuine, a great, and an affecting poet." Sophocles is no solitary instance. On the other hand, Campbell is mistaken in supposing that he meets arguments as to the real defect found in Pope by better thinkers than Mr. Bowles, in vindicating a choice of images drawn from artificial rather than natural objects. In truth, the poet illustrates from beauty wherever he finds it, in art as in nature. The defect in Pope and writers of his school is not so much in not borrowing allusion and description from solitary rural scenes, as in the town-bred affectation of patronising rural nature now and then, and want of sympathy with the romance of nature, and with the contemplative philosophy she inspires. Horace speaks of his Sabine valley with a fondness too passionate to allow of an appraiser's inventory of details: just as a lover, when he thinks of his mistress, finds words to describe the general effect of her beauty on his own heart, but no words to describe all her beauties in particular. He would not be a lover if he could specify the charms of a mistress as a horse-dealer specifies the points of a horse. The poet's eye is not "*attentive* to every variation of light and shade of nature, every walk, every tree, every leaf" — except in those moments when he ceases to be poet, and is not under the poetic influences of nature. The poetic influences of nature tend to abstract the mind of the poet from external objects, — to lull the observant faculties, while stimulating the reflective or imaginative. So that it has been said by a great critic, "The poet can no more explain how he knows so well the outward aspects of the nature which sets him a-dreaming, than he can explain the interior process by which his genius achieves its masterpieces."

Digitized by Google

the Roman's genius. He cannot pretend to the lyrical playfulness and fire, the mingled irony and earnestness, the tender pathos, the exquisite humanity, the wondrous felicity of expression, which render the Odes of Horace matchless in the power of *charm*. He cannot, in his Twickenham villa, seize and interpret the poetry of rural life and sylvan scenery like the recluse of the Sabine farm. Pope's genius, in short, is didactic, not lyrical. He sees no Bacchus teaching song to Nymphs amid rocks remote; no cool groves, with their spiritual choirs, separate him from the populace; he has no Lucretilis for which Faunus exchanges the Arcadian hill. But as the painter of urban life, what in modern or perhaps in ancient literature can compare in elegance with the verse of Pope, unless it be the prose of Addison? No doubt, both these illustrious Englishmen were much influenced by French schools in the culture of their taste and in the formation of their style; but in their acceptation of classical models, it seems to me that they excel the French writers who served to form their taste. In the euphony and amenities of style the prose of Addison certainly surpasses that of Malebranche, whom he is said to have copied; and though Bôileau may equal Pope in neatness of finish and sharpness of wit, he attains neither to Pope's habitual dignity of manner, nor to Pope's occasional sweetness of sentiment.

The English poets preceding the Restoration, when borrowing from or imitating those of other countries (I do not here speak of the models common to all generations of modern writers to be found in the ancient classics), were under Italian influences. From Spenser to Milton the study of Italian is visible in

Digitized by Google

English poets — French models seem to have been ignored. Waller is, I think, the first of our poets popularly known in whom (except in very loose adaptations of Petrarch) the Italian element vanishes; and though he cannot be said to have copied the French, yet he is allowed by their own critics to have anticipated their poets in that neatness and polish by which the French style became noted before the close of his long career. In Dryden the ascendancy of the French influence becomes notable, though rather in form than in spirit — in technical rules than in genuine principles of art; and even on him the influence is struggling and undecided. He accepts rhyme as an improvement in tragic verse; but in this attempt he was preceded by Davenant, and though he studied Corneille, and often goes beyond him in extravagance of expression, he never attained to, nor perhaps comprehended, that secret of Tragic Art which Corneille found less even in the richness of his poetic genius than in the sublimity of his moral nature. Corneille's grandeur as poet was in his grandeur as man; and whether he had written in the finest rhyme or the most simple prose, he would have equally stormed his way upon an audience so susceptible to heroic sentiment as the French ever have been. But whatever Dryden owed to the French, he remains strikingly English, and largely indebted to English predecessors, from Chaucer to Davenant. In Pope, the French element is more pervasive, and more artfully amalgamated with the English. He owed much both to Waller and to Dryden, but it was to those characteristics of either which were most in accordance with French principles of taste. He took nothing from the Italians; little from our own writers, save the two I

Digitized by Google

have named; nothing from Shakespeare, though he comprehended his merit better than Dryden did; nothing from Milton, though in his own day Milton's rank among poets first became popularly acknowledged. Where he was deemed by his contemporaries to have improved upon Dryden, it was in the more complete Frenchification of Dryden's style; and where, in the finer criticism of our day, he is considered less to have improved upon than effeminised Dryden's style, it is in the over-nicety of a taste and practice which refined into what his French contemporaries would have called correctness, the old native freedom of rhythm and cadence, that gives to the verse of Dryden its muscular vigour and blithesome swing. But apart from the mere form of verse a change in the very essence of poetry had been made by the influence which French literature acquired in Europe in the age of Louis XIV. France had become Parisian; and thus the urban or artificial element in the representation of human life superseded the rural or natural. This it had never done in the great masters of Italian poetry. Neither in Dante, nor Petrarch, nor Tasso, nor Ariosto — though the last named exhibits the peculiar knowledge of the world which can only be acquired in the converse of capitals — is seen that terse, epigrammatic form of expression by which the poet of cities desires to reconcile "men about town" to the fatigue of reading poetry at all. As to our English poets before the time of Dryden, if they have one characteristic in common from the highest to the lowest, it is their hearty love for rural nature and a country life.

The urban influence, so strong upon Pope, operated yet more potently on the generation that succeeded

Digitized by Google

him. Pope would have shrunk from confessing the frank love of urban life, with its intellectual excitements; and the scorn of rural life, with the disbelief in its calm contemplative delights, which Johnson loses no occasion to express. Yet, nevertheless, Johnson's knowledge of the world is much wider than that knowledge of the town which sparkles forth with such brilliancy in Pope. Johnson's knowledge of town life wants the intimacy with those higher ranks of society which were familiar to Pope from his youth, and only partially opened to Johnson in his maturer years. Nor did his temperament allow him to treat those trifles, which make the sum of human things in the gayer circles of a metropolis, with the easy elegance of Pope; yet, perhaps from the very defects in his comprehension of the spirit of fashionable life (I mean the spirit which, in all highly civilised capitals, ever forms the fashion of an age), Johnson excels in his conceptions of the middle class, whether of mind or station. And his knowledge of the world has a more robust character than Pope's, embracing larger views of practical human life: With all his love for the roar of Fleet Street — with all his disdain of sequestered shades, Johnson's knowledge of the world is not so much shown in delineations of urban manners, as in the seizure of catholic truths applicable to civilised men wherever they exercise their reason; and perhaps still more clearly perceptible to those in whom country life fosters habits of contemplation, than to the eager spirits that seek in urban life the arena of active contest. His true genius lay in the masculine strength of his common sense; and in spite of his prejudices, of his dogmatism, of his frequent intolerance and occasional paradox —

Digitized by Google

in spite, still more, of a style in prose strangely contrasting the cold severity of his style in verse — unfamiliar, inflated, artificially grandiose — still that common sense has such pith and substance that it makes its way to every plain solid understanding. And while all that Johnson owed to his more imaginative qualities has faded away from his reputation; while his poems are regarded but as scholastic exercises; while his tragedy is left unread; while the fables and tales scattered throughout his essays allure no popular imitation, and even 'Rasselas' is less admired for its loftiness of purpose and conception than censured for its inappropriate dialogue or stilted diction, and neglected for the dryness of its narrative and the frigidity of its characters; while his ablest criticisms, composed in his happiest style, rarely throw light upon what may be called the metaphysics of imaginative art, — his knowledge of the world has a largeness and at times a depth which preserve authority to his opinions upon the general bearings of life and the prevalent characteristics of mankind — a knowledge so expanded, by its apprehension of generical truths, from mere acquaintanceship with conventional manners, and the sphere of the town life which enthralled his tastes, that at this day it is not in capitals that his works are most esteemed as authoritative, but rather in the sequestered homes of rural book-readers. To men of wit about town, a grave sentence from Johnson upon the philosophy of the great world would seem old-fashioned pedantry, where, to men of thought in the country, it would convey some truth in social wisdom too plain to be uttered by pedants, and too solid to be laughed out of fashion by wits.

Digitized by Google

Within the period of which I speak, rose in England the Novel of Manners — a class of composition which necessitates a considerable amount of knowledge of the world. Richardson, Fielding, Smollett, Sterne, not only laid the vast foundations, but raised thereon the noble structures, of an art new to the literature of our country. All four of the writers named exhibit knowledge of the world in very high degree. In Fielding and Smollett that knowledge is the most apparent, from the astonishing vigour with which their characters are depicted and their conceptions expressed. It would be waste of words to show, what no critic has disputed — viz., Fielding's superiority to Smollett (who, nevertheless, is a giant among novelists) in philosophical treatment and dignified conception of narrative art. But Fielding is little more free than Smollett from one defect in imaginative creations, as may be seen more clearly when I shall have occasion to bring him somewhat in comparison with Sir Walter Scott — viz., the too frequent preference of conventional particulars in the selection of types of character. A proof of this may be found in the fact that Fielding, as well as Smollett, is rather national than cosmopolitan, and has had no perceptible influence on the higher forms of fiction in foreign countries. This cannot be said of Richardson and Sterne. Richardson has had, and still retains, an extraordinary influence over the imaginative literature of France; Sterne an influence not less effective over that of Germany. Goethe has attested the obligations he owed to Sterne as well as to Goldsmith. "There is no saying," he declares, with grateful enthusiasm, "how powerfully I was influenced by Goldsmith and Sterne at the most important period of my mental

Digitized by Google

development." And indeed the influence of Sterne may be visibly traced in German literature to this day, wherever its genius cultivates the "Humoristic." The fact is, that while, in the conduct of story, not only Sterne, who very seldom aims at that merit, but even Richardson, who never loses sight of it, is many degrees inferior to Smollett and Fielding, yet in conception of character and in delicacy of treatment we recognise in the former two a finer order of art.

The conceptions of character in Lovelace, Clarissa, Clementina, are founded in the preference of generals to particulars; that is, they are enduring types of great subdivisions in the human family, wholly irrespective of mutations in scene and manners. The knowledge of the world manifested in the creation and completion of such characters is subtler and deeper than Smollett or even Fielding exhibits in his lusty heroes and buxom heroines. Despite the weary tediousness of Richardson's style, the beauties which relieve it are of a kind that bear translation or paraphrase into foreign languages with a facility, which is perhaps the surest test of the inherent substance and cosmopolitan spirit of imaginative writings. The wit and hardihood of Lovelace, the simplicity and *naïveté* of Clarissa, the lofty passion of Clementina, find an utterance in every language, and similitudes in every civilised race.

And what lavish and riotous beauty beyond that of mere prose, and dispensing with the interest of mere fiction, sporting with the Muse like a spoiled darling of the Graces, charms poets and thinkers in the wayward genius of Sterne! Though his most exquisite characters are but sketches and outlines, Mr. Shandy, Uncle Toby, Corporal Trim, and the mysterious shadowy

Digitized by Google

Yorick, — though his finest passages in composition are marred and blurred by wanton conceit, abrupt impertinence, audacious levity, ribald indecorum, — still how the lively enchanter enforces and fascinates our reluctant admiration! Observe how little he is conventional, how indifferent he is to the minute study of particulars, how typical of large generals are his sketches of human character. There is no reason why Uncle Toby, Corporal Trim, Yorick, might not be Frenchmen or Germans, born at any epoch or in any land. Who cares for the mere date and name of the battles which Uncle Toby fights over again? Any battles would do as well — the siege of Troy as well as the siege of Namur.

And both in Richardson's elaborate development of Lovelace's character, and throughout all the lawless phantasies of Tristram Shandy, what surprising knowledge of the world is displayed! — only in Lovelace it is more the world of the town, and therefore Lovelace more pleases the wits of the world of Paris, which is the arch-metropolitan town of Europe; while in Tristram Shandy it is more the boundless world of men, in town or country alike — that world which has no special capital; and therefore Tristram Shandy pleases more the thinkers of the German family, because Germany is a world without a special capital, and every German principality or province has its own Uncle Toby and Yorick.

The close of the last century gave birth to the finest prose comedy in the English, or perhaps any other, language. In abstract wit, Congreve equals, and, in the opinion of some critics, even surpasses, Sheridan; but Congreve's wit is disagreeably cynical. Sheridan's

Digitized by Google

wit has the divine gift of the Graces — charm. The smile it brings to our lips is easy and cordial; the smile which Congreve wrings forth is forced and sardonic. In what is called *vis comica*, Farquhar, it is true, excels Sheridan by the rush of his animal spirits, by his own hearty relish of the mirth he creates. Sheridan's smile, though more polished than Farquhar's, has not less ease; but his laugh, though as genuine, has not the same lusty ring. It is scarcely necessary, however, to point out Sheridan's superiority to Farquhar in the quality of the mirth excited. If in him the *vis comica* has not the same muscular strength, it has infinitely more elegance of movement, and far more disciplined skill in the finer weapons at its command; and whatever comparison may be drawn between the general powers of Sheridan for comic composition and those of Farquhar and Congreve, neither of the two last-named has produced a single comedy which can be compared to the 'School for Scandal.' Even Molière, in prose comedy, has no work of so exquisite an art; where Molière excels Sheridan, it is where he writes in verse, and comes to the field in his panoply of poet. Like the 'Tartuffe' of Molière, the 'School for Scandal' does not borrow its plot from previous writers. Both are among the very few great dramas in which the author has invented his own fable, and perhaps, for this very reason, there are in both much the same faults of situation and *dénouement*. For in both, while the exposition is admirable, the *dénouement* is feeble; and in both there is a resort to a melodramatic contrivance in producing a critical effect in comic situation — viz., the concealment of a personage important in the conduct of the more serious interest of the plot,

Digitized by Google

whether under a table or behind a screen, and preparing the audience for the laugh which is sure to follow the discovery. This is a kind of effect which can be so cheaply produced that there is scarcely a playwright at the Porte St. Martin or the Surrey Theatre who does not press it into his service. But as it does not belong to the legitimate modes of revealing character through purely intellectual processes of self-revelation, and is rather among the resources of stage-trick, I doubt whether it be worthy of place in the masterpieces of comic art. The dramatist who declines to invent his own story, usually pauses long and meditates deeply over the dramatic elements of any fable which he means to adapt to the stage, and is much more alive to faults and merits of situation and *dénouement* in the story he does not invent, than those of a story which he cannot see clearly before him till, in fact, he has told it.

Though Joseph Surface is a systematic hypocrite, he has very little likeness to Tartuffe. Tartuffe is not a comic character* — he is almost tragic, for he creates terror; the interest he gives to the play is, in our vague consciousness of a power intense, secret, and unscrupulous. Joseph Surface is almost as mysterious as Tartuffe; for, unlike Shakespeare's villains, and like Tartuffe, he does not betray himself to the audience by soliloquy. But in Joseph's mysteriousness there is no element of terror: he always remains essentially comic, though of the highest and most refined order of

* Marmontel, whose criticisms abound with *finesse* of observation, observes that "not one of the principal personages in the 'Tartuffe' is comic in himself. They all become comic by their opposition."— Marmontel upon 'Comedy.'

Digitized by Google

comedy. No doubt the outlines of his character were suggested by Fielding's portrait of Blifil, as those of Charles Surface have their ruder original in Tom Jones. But Joseph is, what Blifil is not, an exceedingly polished member of polite society — the type of those civil, well-mannered, sentimental impostors whom we meet every day in the most brilliant circles, political and social. Lady Teazle is a more vivid and life-like female character than the ladies in 'Tartuffe;' but Orgon's wife has a touching chastity of sentiment to which Sir Peter's makes no pretence. I once heard a distinguished critic contend that the interest in Lady Teazle, and, through her, in the whole progress of the play, might have been advantageously heightened if her alleged inexperience had been more genuinely artless — if she had not joined with such gusto in the slanders which delight her fashionable friends, and seemed the sharpest-tongued pupil in the whole School of Scandal; and that the plot would have also gained in elevation of interest if Sir Peter's position, which is in itself one that touches the human heart, had been somewhat more raised in the scale of intellectual dignity. But I think we shall find, on reflection, that for the purpose of pure prose comedy any such changes tending to poetise character and situation would have been for the worse. Had our sentiment for Lady Teazle been a whit more tender, and our sympathy for Sir Peter been a whit more respectful, the peril Lady Teazle incurs from the sleek temptations of Joseph would have become almost tragically painful. We could never have quite forgiven her for subjecting herself to it — it is her frivolity of character, in fact, that alone justifies our indulgence. And had Sir Peter

Digitized by Google

established a higher and graver place in our affectionate esteem, I doubt whether we should have had the same good-humoured pleasure in his final reconciliation with the helpmate by whom the honour of his name had been so carelessly risked, to be so narrowly saved.

The surpassing merits of the "School for Scandal" become the more brilliant the more minutely they are scanned, and the more fairly the faults of the play are put in juxtaposition with its beauties. Its merits are not so much to be sought in the saliency of any predominating excellence as in the harmonious combination of great varieties of excellence, in a unity of purpose sufficiently philosophical for the intellect of comedy, but not so metaphysical as to mar the airy playfulness of comic mirth. The satire it conveys is directed, not to rare and exceptional oddities in vice or folly, but to attributes of human society which universally furnish the materials and justify the ridicule of satire. It is one of the beauties of this great drama, that its moral purpose is not rigidly narrowed into the mere illustration of a maxim — that the outward plot is indeed carried on by personages who only very indirectly serve to work out the interior moral. Sir Peter, Charles Surface, the Uncle, are not pupils in the "School for Scandal" — nor do they share in its tasks; and by this very largeness of plan the minor characters acquire a vitality they would otherwise want. Without Charles and Sir Peter, a Backbite and a Candour would be mere abstractions symbolised by the names they bear. But once admit the more spontaneous flesh-and-blood characters of Sir Peter and Charles, and the personifications of abstract satire take vital substance and warmth by the contact; and wherever we look

Digitized by Google

throughout the range of our worldly acquaintances we recognise a Sir Benjamin Backbite and a Mrs. Candour. I think it the originality and charm of the plot itself, that the members of the School of Scandal rather constitute the chorus of the drama than its active agents. And with what ease the marvellous wit of this marvellous comedy grows like a mother tongue out of the ideas which the author wants to express! What large knowledge of the world that wit epitomises in its epigrams! How naturally its *bons-mots* idealise the talk of our *salons* and drawing-rooms! There, refined by genius, is the dialogue of fashionable wits so long as fashion has rank in polite cities.

Campbell observes "that Dryden praises the gentlemen in Beaumont and Fletcher as the men of fashion of the times;" and Campbell adds, "it was necessary that Dryden should call them the men of fashion of the times, for they are not, in the highest sense of the word, gentlemen."

This is true of Beaumont and Fletcher. Of Congreve we may say that in no times could his heroes have been "gentlemen." Farquhar is happier. Sir Harry Wildair is a gentleman of fashion, but regarded as a young *ci-devant* actor who had obtained a commission in the army, which he did not long keep, would naturally regard a gentleman of fashion — at a distance — to bow to him, not to live with him. Sheridan's gentlemen are drawn by the pen of one who could not more have flattered a Sir Harry Wildair than by calling him "My dear fellow."

In Sheridan's comedy, knowledge of manners — knowledge of the world — is consummate, and, especially in the "School for Scandal," illustrated through

Digitized by Google

enduring types. Like the other great writers of his day, his knowledge is concentred in town-knowledge. But town-knowledge, though not the first requisite in the world-knowledge of a poet or philosopher, is precisely the knowledge which we seek in the writer of comedy who, selecting prose for his medium of expression, gives us in substance the prose of life, and not its poetry. Comedy — at least prose comedy — must be gregarious and urban.

In fine, there are very few works in the literature of England, of which, as compared with the analogous literature of other countries, we have a right to be more proud than the 'School for Scandal.' If, in the poetry of the drama, we can challenge Europe to produce a rival to Shakespeare, so, in the essential prose of the drama, — in the comedy that dispenses with poetry altogether — that embodies, through forms the most exquisitely appropriate to its purpose, the idealised objects of comedy, — we may challenge Europe to show us a performance equal to the 'School for Scandal.'

We must now turn back to glance at the greatest of the French authors in whom this knowledge of the world has been displayed, not as court satirists, but as men who combine the calm lore of the philosopher with the impartial human heart of the poet. And here I cannot refuse his due rank to the Father of Modern Essay. Montaigne owes his immortality — owes his enduring influence upon thought — to that knowledge of the world which is wholly independent of change in manners.

Montaigne is in one respect the antipodes of Shakespeare; in another respect he is the French writer I

Digitized by Google

would crave leave most to place in comparison with Shakespeare.

Montaigne is the antipodes to Shakespeare, inasmuch as he is intensely subjective, obtrusively personal. So, as a narrator of his own personal experiences and opinions, he ought to have been; just as Shakespeare, where a dramatist, could not have been obtrusively personal, even where writing his own most haunting thoughts. But where Montaigne is to be likened to Shakespeare is in the similar result at which, through so antagonistic a process, he arrives. Though apparently only studying himself, he himself has a nature so large that it comprehends mankind. Never did one man in his egotism more faithfully represent the greatest number of attributes common to the greatest number of men. His grasp comprehends materials for thought that it might task a thousand sages to work up into systems. His fineness of vision seizes on subtleties in character and mysteries in feeling that might open new views of the human heart to a thousand poets: and all with the same seeming artlessness which deceived even Milton himself as to the art of Shakespeare. No essay yet written is so artful as one of Montaigne's great essays, just as no drama yet written is so artful as one of Shakespeare's great dramas. The proof of art in both is the delight that they give to artists who have done their best to consider how to write a drama or how to write an essay.

Montaigne's way of viewing life, men, and manners was, as I have elsewhere said, emphatically that of the lyrical poet — viz., through a medium of personal feeling rather than scientific reasoning. He has a poet's

Digitized by Google

instinctive repugnance to system; whereas a scientific reasoner has to system an almost unconquerable attraction. He gives us his impressions of men and things, troubling himself very little with the defence of his impressions; and his survey of the world is the more comprehensive because it is taken from a height and at a distance: he has seen the world, and mixed in its pleasures and pursuits; he means still to do so as an inquirer; every year he hopes to mount his horse; to ride into foreign lands, and wander through foreign cities. But when he *writes* of the world, it is in his old Gascon Tower — it is in a chamber which his nearest of kin are forbidden to enter, and in which his only comrades are books. He complacently tells us he has got together a thousand volumes — a great library for that day; but as most of those volumes must have been the books of a very different day, they only serve to enforce his own opinions and illustrate his own experience. It is his own human heart, as he has tested it through his own human life, that he first analyses and then synthesises. And out of that analysis and that synthesis, he dissects into separate members, and then puts together again, the world.

From Montaigne we pass to Molière, whose study of the humours of men necessarily embraced those views of the world of men which afford theme and subject to the Comic Poet. Knowledge of the world in him is not, therefore, spontaneously poured forth as in Montaigne; it is trained to the purposes of comic art, and considered with an eye accustomed to stage effect; so that where most philosophical it is somewhat too sharply limited to satire; and where most sportive,

Digitized by Google

somewhat too wantonly carried away into farce. But Molière is one of that rarest order of poets whose very faults become sacred in the eyes of admirers. He is not only revered as a master, but beloved by us as a friend. Of all the French dramatists, he is the only one whose genius is as conspicuous to foreign nations as it is to his own. Like Shakespeare, he is for all time and for all races. A piercing observer of the society around him, he selects from that society types the least socially conventional. His very men of fashion are never out of the fashion. Where most he excels all that is left to us of the comedy of the ancients is where his invention most escapes from its influence, and reveals those truths of a poetry almost tragic, which lie half in light, half in shadow, on the serious side of humour. Here, the comedy of the 'Misanthrope' is without rival as to conception of character and delicacy of treatment, though in point of dramatic construction and vigour of style the 'Tartuffe' has been held to surpass it. "The exposition of 'Tartuffe,'" says Goethe, "is without its equal — it is the grandest and best of its kind."

Of all the many kinds of knowledge possessed by Voltaire, knowledge of the world was, perhaps, that for which he was most remarkable. It was that knowledge which secured to him so vast an audience and so lofty a position; and the aptitude for such kind of knowledge was inborn with him — made three parts of his *ingenium* or native genius. While little more than a boy, this son of a notary lifted himself to that social rank which he ever afterwards maintained as a vantage-ground to his sway over the millions. The brilliant *protégé* of Ninon de l'Enclos, the favourite wit of

Digitized by Google

Philippe the Regent, before the beard was dark on his chin; other neophytes of inferior birth admitted into the circles of social greatness usually wither away in that chilling atmosphere: their genius accommodates itself to the trifles which make up the life of idlers — their spirit bows itself to dependence; they contribute to the amusement of princes, yet are the last persons to whom princes accord the solid rewards of fortune.

But, from the first, Voltaire put to profit the personages out of whom a mere man of genius could have extracted nothing beyond praise and famine. Before he was twenty, he learned, in the society of a Vendôme and a Conti, how to flatter the great without meanness — how to maintain equality with them, yet not seem to presume — and how to put them to use with the air of doing them a favour. Ninon de l'Enclos took a fancy to this brilliant boy; Ninon de l'Enclos took a fancy to a great many brilliant boys, much more adapted to strike the eye and the senses of an antiquated beauty than the spindleshanked son of the notary Arouet; but Ninon distinguished young Arouet from other brilliant boys in this — she left him two thousand francs. The youth destined to convulse nations, knew by intuition that a man who would raise himself into a Power should begin by securing a pecuniary independence. It has been said of some writers that, from the first, they always tenderly nursed their fame. Voltaire did not do that; he sported with his fame, but he always tenderly nursed his fortune.

He early foresaw that his future life would be, as he defined it later, a combat; and accordingly took care betimes to provide himself with the sinews of war. By skilful speculations in the commerce of Cadiz, and in

Digitized by Google

the purchase of corn in Barbary — still more happily by obtaining, through what we should now call a job, an interest *dans les vivres de l'armée d'Italie*, which brought him in 800,000 francs — he established a capital, which, as he invested it in life-annuities, yielded an income far above that enjoyed by the average number of the half-ruined nobles of France.

In the course of his long life Voltaire was, of course, more than once in love; but only once, and then, when the heyday of youth was over, did he form that kind of attachment which influences a man's existence. We may doubt the strength of his passion, but the prudence with which he selected its object is incontestable. He chose a *marquise* of good fortune, with a luxurious *château* and scientific predilections. Thus, far from finding in love the impoverisher of fortune and the disturber of philosophy, this wise man of the world made love fill his Exchequer and provide his Academe.

With Madame du Chastelet he shared the delights of an excellent table, the refined relaxations of a polished society; with Madame du Chastelet he shared also the study of the problems in Newton's 'Principia;' and when death bereaved the philosopher of his well-selected helpmate, the tender mathematician bequeathed him a better consolation than any to be found in Boethius — she left him a handsome addition to his already handsome fortune.

According to astrology, Venus and Saturn are friendly stars to each other; the one presides over love, the other over heritages. Voltaire, as thorough man of the world, united both in his First House. And thus, even in that passion which usually makes fools of the

Digitized by Google

wisest, Voltaire pursued the occupations of wisdom, and realised the rewards of wealth.

Throughout his whole career the great writer exhibited in his own person that supreme knowledge of the world which constitutes the characteristic excellence of his works. And when he retired at last to his palace at Ferney, it was with the income of a prince, and the social consideration paid to a king.

Perhaps, however, while knowledge of the world constitutes the characteristic excellence of Voltaire's writings, it also contributes to their characteristic defect. Genius may be world-wide, but it should not be world-limited. Voltaire never escapes "this visible diurnal sphere." With all his imagination he cannot comprehend the enthusiasm which lifts itself above the earth. His Mahomet is only an ambitious impostor, whom he drags on the stage as a philosophical expositor of the wiles and crimes of priestcraft. With all his mastery of language he cannot achieve the highest realms of poetic expression or passionate eloquence; he is curbed by what he had learned in the polite world to call "good sense" and "good taste." His finest characters exhibit no delicate shades, no exquisite subtleties, like those of Shakespeare and Goethe. His finest verses are but sonorous declamations, or philosophical sentences admirably rhymed. Like Goethe, he is fond of "motivating," and the personages of his fictions always act upon philosophical principles; but, unlike Goethe, he is jejune as a metaphysician, and sterile as a psychologist. His plays — even some of those now unread and unacted — are masterpieces of mechanical construction; the speeches they contain are often as full of pith and of sound as

Digitized by Google

if they had been aphorisms of Seneca versified by Lucan. But his personages want not only the lifelike movement of flesh and blood, but that *spirituality of character* (if I may use the term) which is not put into play by springs merely intellectual, and which, as it is most evident in all higher types of man, is essential to the representations of such types in the drama. If we compare those parts in his tragedies which are considered the most striking with the heroic parts conceived and embodied by Corneille, they often satisfy better our logical judgment: what they do is more within the range of prose probabilities — what they say is more conformable to the standard of prose common-sense. But they do not, like Corneille's, seize hold of the heart through its noblest emotions — carry the soul aloft from the conventional judgments of the mind in its ordinary dealings with ratiocinated prose life, and utter, in the language of men, sentiments which men never could utter if they were not immortals as well as men. The grandest of all our instincts is also that which is the most popularly stirred — viz., the struggle of thought from the finite towards the infinite. And this is the reason why the heroic in character and sentiment is always popularly comprehended on the stage — and why, through whatever varying phase it be exhibited, it is, when genuine, among those evidences of the spiritual nature of abstract man, which, by a common sympathy, all races of men appreciate and seek to preserve.

Voltaire himself seems complacently to mark the limit which divides his genius from that of a Shakespeare or a Goethe, in a knowledge of this world, so sharply closed that it rejects all that divining conjec-

Digitized by Google

ture of the worlds beyond it, to which their knowledge of this world leads them so restlessly upward. His views of the poetry of life are thus always taken from some side of its material prose. In his genius, whether as poet or philosopher, every genuine poet, or every earnest thinker, recognises a want which he finds it difficult to express. Certainly Voltaire has the art of a poet, certainly he is not without the science of a thinker; but poetry is not all art — thought is not all science. What Voltaire seems most to want is the warmth of soul which supplies to poetry the nameless something that art alone cannot give, and to thought the free outlets into belief and conjecture which science would cease to be science if it did not refuse to admit. Be this as it may, Voltaire's knowledge of this world, as exhibited whether in his life or his writings, was exceedingly keen and sharp; and for any knowledge of a world beyond this, Voltaire is the last guide a man of bold genius would follow, or a man of calm judgment consult.

It is strange that the two contemporary writers in whom knowledge of the world is most conspicuously displayed, should have depreciated, if not actually despised, each other. Le Sage had the temerity to ridicule Voltaire at a period, indeed, of that author's life when his *chefs-d'œuvre* had not yet raised him above ridicule. Voltaire, in turn, speaks of Le Sage with the lofty disdain of slighting commendation — as a writer not altogether without merit, allowing 'Gil Blas' the praise of being 'natural,' but dismissing it as a literal plagiarism from the Spanish. Yet perhaps all Voltaire's books put together do not contain so much knowledge of the world, artificial no less than natural, as

Digitized by Google

that same 'Gil Blas'; and Voltaire, with his practical mastery of his own language, ought to have been the first to perceive that, whatever 'Gil Blas' might owe to the Spanish, a book more thoroughly French in point of form and style, more original in all that constitutes artistic originality, is not to be found in the literature of France.* The form, the style, is indeed singularly at variance with the marked peculiarities of Spanish humour. Compare the style of 'Gil Blas' with that of Cervantes or Quevedo, and the radical distinctions between the spirit of the French language and that of the Spanish become conclusively apparent. The language of Spain is essentially a language of proverbs; every other sentence is a proverb. In proverbs, lovers woo: in proverbs, politicians argue; in proverbs, you make your bargain with your landlady or hold a conference with your muleteer. The language of Spain is built upon those diminutive relics of a wisdom that may have existed before the Deluge, as the town of Berlin is built upon strata amassed, in the process of ages, by the animalcules that dwell in their pores. No servile translation, nay, no liberal paraphrase from a Spanish wit (such as Le Sage's masterpiece has been deemed by his detractors), would not immediately betray its Spanish origin. But there is not a vestige of the ineffaceable characteristic of the Spanish language in the idiomatic ease of Le Sage's exquisite French. The humour of Spain, as may be expected from a language of proverbs, is replete with hyperbole and metaphor; it abounds with similes or images that provoke your

* At a later period of his life, Le Sage published a translation of the very novel of which 'Gil Blas' was said to be the servile copy. This was probably his best mode of refuting the charge against him.

Digitized by Google

laughter by their magnificent extravagance. Take, for instance, the following description of the miserly schoolmaster in Quevedo's 'Paul the Sharper.' I quote from an old translation (1741), admirable for raciness and gusto: —

"The first Sunday after Lent we were brought into the house of Famine, for 'tis impossible to describe the penury of the place. The master was a skeleton — a mere shotten herring, or like a long slender cane with a little head upon it, and red-haired; so that there needs no more to be said to such as know the proverb — 'that neither cat nor dog of that colour are good.' His eyes almost sunk into his head, as if he had looked through a perspective glass, or the deep windows in a linendraper's shop. His beard had lost its colour for fear of his mouth, which, being so near, seemed to threaten to eat it for mere hunger. His neck as long as a crane's, with the gullet sticking out so far as if it had been compelled by necessity to start out for sustenance. . . . . He walked leisurely, and whenever he happened to move anything faster, his bones rattled like a pair of snappers. As for his chamber, there was not a cobweb in it — the spiders being all starved to death. He put spells upon the mice for fear they should gnaw some scraps of bread he kept. His bed was on the floor, and he always lay on one side for fear of wearing out the sheets."

The humour of this passage is extraordinary for riot and redundance. Can anything less resemble the unforced gaiety, the easy, well-bred wit of 'Gil Blas'? Nor is it only in form and style that 'Gil Blas' is pre-eminently French; many of its salient anecdotes and illustrations of manners are suggested by Parisian life,

Digitized by Google

and the whole social colouring of the novel is caught from a Parisian atmosphere. In truth, the more we examine the alleged evidences of Le Sage's plagiarism, the more visible the originality of his 'Gil Blas' becomes. It is the same with all writers of first-rate genius. They may seize what they did not inherit with an audacity that shocks the moral nerves of a critic, yet so incorporate in their own dominion every rood of ground they annex, that the result is an empire the world did not know before. Little wits that plagiarise are but pickpockets; great wits that plagiarise are conquerors. One does not cry "Stop thief!" to Alexander the Great when he adds to the heritage of Macedon the realms of Asia; one does not cry "Plagiarist!" to Shakespeare when we discover the novel from which he borrowed a plot. A writer's true originality is in his form — is in that which distinguishes the mould of his genius from the mintage of any other brain. When we have patiently examined into all Lawrence Sterne's alleged thefts, collated passages in Burton's 'Anatomy' with passages in 'Tristram Shandy,' the chief amaze of a discerning critic is caused by the transcendent originality with which Sterne's sovereign genius has, in spite of all the foreign substances it laid under contribution, preserved unique, unimitating and inimitable, its own essential idiosyncrasy of form and thought. True, there are passages in 'Tristram Shandy' taken almost literally from Burton's 'Anatomy.' But can any book be less like another than Burton's 'Anatomy' to 'Tristram Shandy'? When you have shown us all the straws in a block of amber, and proved to our entire satisfaction that the amber had imbedded the straws, still the amber remains the amber, all the

Digitized by Google

more curious and all the more valuable for the liberty it took with the straws.

But though 'Gil Blas' be in form and colouring decidedly French, the knowledge of life it illustrates is so vast that, in substance, it remains to this day the epitome of the modern world. Amid all mutations of external manners, all varying fashions of costume, stand forth in immortal freshness its large types of civilised human nature. Its author is equally remarkable for variety of character, formed by the great world, and for accurate insight into the most general springs of action by which they who live in the great world are moved. Thus he is as truthful to this age as he was to his own. His Don Raphael and his Ambrose Lamela are still specimens of the two grand divisions in the genus Rogue, the bold and the hypocritical — as familiarly known to the police of London and Paris as they were to the Brotherhood of St. Hermandad; his Camilla is still found in Belgravia or Brompton; his Don Gonzales is still the elderly dupe of some artful Euphrasia. Who has not met with his Archbishop of Grenada?

Though the satire in 'Gil Blas' can be very keen, as when the author whets its blade to strike at actors and doctors, yet, for the most part, it is less satire than pleasantry. No writer, with power equal to Le Sage over the springs of ridicule, more rarely abuses it to the service of libel and caricature.

Le Sage's knowledge of the world is incomparably more wide than that of Rochefoucauld — nay, even of Voltaire; partly because the survey extends to regions towards which the first scarcely glanced, and partly because it is never, as with the second, dwarfed to a system, nor fined away into the sharp point of a scoff.

Digitized by Google

The humanity of 'Gil Blas' himself, however frail and erring, is immense, indulgent, genial. He stands by Olivarez in the reverse of fortune, and to his ear the fallen minister confides the secret of the spectre which haunts the solitude of foiled ambition; but he is found at the side of Fabricio, in the hospital at Madrid, and hears the poor poet assure him that he has so thoroughly abjured the ungrateful Muse, that at that very moment he is composing the verses in which he bids her farewell. He is not always in cities, though his sphere of action be in them: he can enjoy the country; his sketches of rural landscape are delicious. When he comes to settle in his pleasant retreat of Llirias, who does not share his delight in the discovery of a fourth pavilion stored with books? and who does not admire the fidelity to human nature with which the author seizes on his hero's pause from the life of towns, to make him find for the first time the happy leisure to fall in love?

Since 'Gil Blas' I know not if France has produced any one novel remarkable for knowledge of the world, though, taking all together, the mass of recent French novels certainly exhibits a great deal of that knowledge. Perhaps it may be found, more than in any other French novelist of his brilliant day, in that large miscellany of fictions which M. de Balzac has grouped together under the title of 'La Comédie Humaine;' but it is not within my intention to illustrate the criticism contained in this essay by contemporaneous examples. The criticism of contemporaries is the most unsatisfactory of all compositions. The two most popular writers of the last generation — Scott and Byron — naturally engaged the analytical examination

Digitized by Google

of some of the finest intellects of their time; and yet, if we turn back to the pages of our quarterly reviews, and read again what was there said of Byron's new poem or Scott's new tale, we are startled to see how shallow and insipid, how generally indiscriminate in praise or in censure, reviewers so distinguished contrived to be. Large objects must not only be placed at a certain distance from the eye that would measure them, but the ground immediately around them must be somewhat cleared. We may talk, write, argue, dispute, about the authors of our own day; but to criticise is to judge, and no man can be a judge while his mind is under all the influences of a witness. If I feel impressed with this conviction in treating of contemporary foreign authors, I must feel impressed with it yet more strongly in treating of the contemporary writers of my own country.

We stand even too near to the time of Walter Scott to escape the double influence — firstly, of the action which, during his life, he exercised on the literature of Europe; and secondly, of the reaction which always follows the worship paid to a writer of dazzling celebrity when his career is closed and his name is no longer on every tongue. Among the rising generation, neither Scott nor Byron, according to the invariable laws to which the fluctuations of fame are submitted, can receive other than the languid approbation with which persons speak of a something that has just gone out of fashion without having yet acquired the veneration due to antiquity. In proportion as a taste in authorship, architecture, in the arts of embellishment — down even to those employed on furniture and dress — has been carried to enthusiasm in its own day, is the

Digitized by Google

indifference with which it is put aside for some new fashion in the day that immediately succeeds. Let time pass on — and what was undervalued as rococo, becomes again, if it have real merit, the rage as classic. I am not, therefore, at all surprised when a young lady, fresh from the nursery, tells me that all Lord Byron ever wrote is not worth a stanza by a Mr. Somebody, of whom, out of England, Europe has never heard; nor does it amaze me, when a young gentleman, versed in light literature, tells me he finds Scott as a romance-writer, heavy, and prefers the novels of a Mr. or Miss Somebody, whose very name he will have forgotten before he is forty. When suns set, little stars come in fashion. But suns re-arise with the morrow. A century or two hence, Byron and Scott will not be old-fashioned, but ancient; and then they may be estimated according to their degree of excellence in that art, which is for all time, and not, as now, according to their place in or out of the fashion, which is but of a day. Milton and Shakespeare were for a time out of fashion. So indeed was Homer himself. If, then, the remarks upon Walter Scott, which I very diffidently hazard, convey no criticism worthy the subject, his admirers will have the satisfaction of believing that he will find ample work for much better critics than I am, five hundred years hence. And, first, it appears to me that one cause of Sir Walter Scott's unprecedented popularity as a novelist, among all classes and in all civilised lands, is to be found in the ease and the breadth of his knowledge of the world. He does not pretend to much metaphysical science or much vehement eloquence of passion. He troubles himself very little with the analysis of mind, with the

Digitized by Google

struggle of conflicting emotions. For that reason, he could never have obtained, in the highest walks of the drama, a success correspondent to the loftiness of his fame as a tale-teller. The drama must bare to an audience the machinery of an intellect or the world of a heart. No mere interest of narrative, no mere skill of situation, can, for a play that is to retain a permanent hold on the stage, supply the want of that wondrous insight into motive and conduct which attests the philosophy of Shakespeare, or that fervent oratory of passion which exalts into eloquence almost superhuman the declamatory verse of Corneille. Scott could neither have described nor even conceived the progress of jealousy in Othello. He could not have described nor even conceived that contrast between Curiace and either Horace, father or son, in which is so sublimely revealed the secret of the Roman ascendancy. But, as an artist of Narrative and not of the Drama, Scott was perhaps the greater for his omissions. Let any reader bring to his recollection that passage in the grandest tragic romance our language possesses — the 'Bride of Lammermoor' — in which, the night before the Master of Ravenswood vanishes from the tale, he shuts himself up in his fated tower, and all that is known of the emotions through which his soul travailed, is the sound of his sleepless heavy tread upon the floor of his solitary room. What can be grander in narrative art, than the suppression of all dramatic attempt to analyse emotion and reduce its expression to soliloquy? But that matchless effect in narrative art would have been impossible in dramatic. On the stage, the suffering man must have spoken *out* — words must have been found for the utterance of the agonised heart. If Scott

Digitized by Google

here avoided that resort to language as the interpretation of passion which Shakespeare in a similar position of one of his great characters would have seized, Scott is the more to be admired as a master in the art he undertook, which was not subjected to dramatic necessities, and permitted him to trust, for the effect he sought to convey, to the imagination of the reader; as in the old Greek picture, Agamemnon's grief in the sacrifice of his daughter was expressed, not by depicting his face, but by concealing it behind his mantle.

Still, throughout all his greatest romances, a discerning critic will notice how sparingly Scott dissects the mechanism of the human mind; how little the inclinations of his genius dispose him either towards the metaphysical treatment or the poetical utterance of conflicting passions. And it is for that reason that his stories, when dramatised, are melodramas, and cannot, with justice to himself, be converted into tragedies. The nearest approach he has made to metaphysical analysis or passionate eloquence, and therefore to the creation of a great dramatic part, is in one of his later and least popular romances, 'The Fair Maid of Perth.' The conception of a young Highland chief—not without noble qualities, bound by every motive of race, of pride, of love, to exhibit the vulgar personal courage which a common smith possesses to extreme, and failing from mere want of nerve — is, in point of metaphysical knowledge poetically expressed, both new and true; and in point of dramatic passion might be made on the stage intensely pathetic. But Scott does not do full justice to his own thoughtful conception. It is a magnificent idea, not perfected by the originator, but out of which some future dramatist could

Digitized by Google

make an immortal play — which no dramatist ever could out of those gems of narrative romance, 'Ivanhoe' and 'Kenilworth.' But if Scott did not exhibit a depth and subtlety proportioned to the wide scope of his genius, in the dissection of the human mind or the delineation of human passion, he carried knowledge of the world — knowledge of manners, of social life in general — to an extent which no previous British novelist has ever reached; and so harmoniously, so artistically, poetised that knowledge, that it is not one of the merits in him which would most strike an ordinary critic. For Scott did not deal with the modern world of manners — his great fictions do not touch upon our own time, nor invite our immediate recollections of what we have witnessed. His art is all the greater for not doing so; and so is his knowledge of the world, as the world is ever in human societies. In 'Ivanhoe,' for instance, there are many defects in mere antiquarian accuracy. Two or three centuries are massed together in a single year. But the general spirit of the age is made clear to popular apprehension, and stands forth with sufficient fidelity to character and costume for the purpose, not of an antiquarian, but of a poet. And it is the author's knowledge of the world, as the world is ever, which enables him to give such interest, charm, and vitality to his portraitures of manners so unfamiliar to our own. The great types of character he selects are those which could have occurred to no writer who had not acquired a very large acquaintance with mankind in his own time, and who had not made that acquaintance aid him, whether in the philosophical or the poetical transcript of an era dim-seen through our

Digitized by Google

chronicles. Is there, throughout all prose fiction (except elsewhere in his own), anything comparable, in the union of practical truth with poetised expression, to Scott's portraitures of the Saxon Cedric, Athelstane, Wamba, Gurth, and the Norman De Bracy, Front de Bœuf, Prince John, Cœur de Lion? With what consummate knowledge of real life even the gentle insipid virtues of Ivanhoe are indicated as the necessary link between the Saxon and Norman! It is ever thus to this day. The man who yields to what must be — who deserts the superstitious adherence to what has been for an acquiescence in what is — has always, when honourable and sincere, a something in him of an Ivanhoe or a Waverley.

Knowledge of the world never forsakes Walter Scott, and in him it is always idealised up to the point of dramatic narrative, and no further. His kings speak according to all our popular associations with those kings — his nobles are always nobles, idealised as poetry should idealise nobles — his peasants, always peasants, idealised as poetry should idealise peasants; but in both noble and peasant, no idealising process destroys what I may call the practical side of truth in character. Scott's kings may be a little more kingly than a leveller finds them; still their foibles are not disguised, and they are never stilted and over-purpled. His peasants may be a little wittier and sharper than a fine gentleman discovers peasants to be; still they are not falsified into epigrammatists or declaimers. His humanity, like Shakespeare's, is always genial and indulgent. Hence, despite his strong political opinions, the wondrous impartiality with which, as an artist, he brings out the grand heroic features which belong to

Digitized by Google

the chosen representatives of either party. It is true that he exalts overmuch the Cavalier accomplishments of Claverhouse, but then he brings into fuller light than history reveals the Roundhead grandeur of Burley. It is true that the cruelty of the one vanishes overmuch, according to strict history, in graceful, lovable curves of chivalric beauty; but it is also true that the ferocious fanaticism of the other vanishes amid the awe man always feels for conscientious convictions and indomitable zeal. Claverhouse in Scott is more beautiful than he was in life — Burley more sublime; in both the author is artistically right. For, if I do not err in the doctrine I have elsewhere laid down — that the great artist seeks generals and not particulars, avoids, in art, the exact portraitures of individuals, and seeks, in selecting individuals, great representative types of humanity — then the Claverhouse of Scott is to be regarded, not as Claverhouse alone, but as the idealised type of the haughty Cavalier, with his faults and merits; and Burley is not Burley alone, but the type, also idealised, of the fanatical Roundhead, with all the heroism of his zeal, even when maddened by the extravagances of his sect. A man of Walter Scott's opinions must have been, indeed, a large-minded man of the world — and an artist, sovereign in the impartiality of art, before he could have given to Balfour of Burley that claim to moral reverence which no writer on the Cavalier side of the question ever before gave to a Roundhead. Compare Hudibras to Walter Scott, and at once you see the distinction between the satirical partisan and the world-wise poet, who, seeking through the world whatever of grand or beautiful his wisdom can discover, exalts, indeed, but never mocks,

Digitized by Google

beauty or grandeur wherever he finds it; and is himself unconscious, in the divine impartiality of art, that he has sometimes placed the most enduring elements of grandeur on the side to which, in the opinions of his own actual life, he is most opposed. Does Homer more favour the Greeks or Trojans? — that is a fair dispute with scholars. But the secret of his preference is really locked within his own breast. Certainly he must (whether he was one Homer or a minstrelsy of Homers) have had a partisan's preference for one or the other. But if the Trojan, how impartially he compels our admiration of Achilles! — if the Greek, how impartially he centres our tenderness and sympathy upon Hector! Such impartiality is the highest exposition of knowledge of the world, and also of poetic art. Both these seeming opposites meet at the same point in the circle of human intellect — viz., that respect for humanity in which are merged and lost all the sectarian differences of actual individual life. Only where this point is reached do we have knowledge of the world or poetic art at its grandest apogee. And this truth is, perhaps, best shown by a reference to historians. History, in its highest ideal, requires an immense knowledge of the world; it requires also something of the genius and heart of a poet, though it avoids poetical form — that is, the difference between an accurate chronicler and a great historian is to be found partly in knowledge, not only of dry facts, but of the motives and practical conduct of mankind, and partly in the seasonable eloquence, not of mere diction, but of thought and sentiment, which is never to be found in a man who has in him nothing of the poet's nature. Yet a historian may

Digitized by Google

possess a high degree of both these essentials, but failing of the highest, at which both should conjoin — viz., *impartiality* — the world cannot accept him as an authority. For this reason, while admiring their brilliant qualities as writers on history, no just-thinking man can ever recognise the authority of a historian in Hume or Macaulay. Scott, though a writer of romance, and having in his actual life political opinions quite as strong as those of Macaulay or Hume — yet, partly from a frank commune with the world in all its classes and divisions, partly from the compulsion of his art, which ordained him to seek what was grand or beautiful on either side of conflicting opinion, conveys infinitely fairer views of historical character than either of those illustrious writers of history. Scott, in a romance, could not have fallen into such Voltairean abasements of the grand principle of religious faith as those into which Hume descends when he treats of the great Puritans of the civil wars. Nor could Scott, in a romance, have so perverted the calm judicial functions of history as Lord Macaulay has done in that elaborated contrast between James II. and William and Mary, which no pomp of diction can reconcile to the reader's sense of justice and truth. The more the character of James (not as king only, but as man) is remorselessly blackened — in order to heighten, by that effect of contrast which is the favourite artifice of forensic rhetoric, the effulgence of light so lavishly thrown around every phase of frosty character in William — the more it offends us to find only the oratorical advocate where, seated in the tribunal of history, we had looked for the impartial judge. And here our reason is the more fortified against abuse of eloquence

Digitized by Google

by the instincts of the universal human heart. Political reasons abound to justify a people for deposing a despotic and bigoted king, and placing on his throne, to the exclusion of the son who, according to customary right, would succeed to the vacancy, his daughter and the foreign prince she had married. But it is a vain endeavour to show that the ambitious prince and the heartless daughter were paragons of disinterested goodness and exquisite feeling. So long as human nature is human nature, it will be out of the power of genius to render William and Mary amiable and lovely characters in the eyes of those who learn at their own hearthstones to believe that whatever punishment a man, be he king or peasant, may deserve, it is not for his own daughter, nor for his daughter's husband, to be alike the punishers and the profiters by the punishment.

Scott, then, has a merit rare among even great historians — artistic impartiality. He has a merit, too, rare among even great novelists — a knowledge of the world exhibited through such types of character as are not effaceable by the mutations of time and manners. There is, in this last, a remarkable distinction between Scott and Fielding, though Fielding describes the manners of his own time, and Scott those of earlier ages; and yet, largely as Fielding's knowledge of the world was displayed, that knowledge is still more comprehensive in Scott. In Scott there is a finer insight into those elements of social manners which are permanent, not fleeting — general, and not particular. And his survey of the society of past times owed its breadth and its verisimilitude to his perceptions and experience of society in his own time. He gives us

Digitized by Google

innumerable examples of the class of gentleman and gentlewoman; and they are always truthful to the enduring ideals of that class — ideals which no change of time or scene can render obsolete. But Fielding is not happy in the portraits of his ladies and gentlemen. There is no age of manners in which a Tom Jones would not be somewhat vulgar, and a Lady Bellaston an offensive libel on womanhood; while, in his most striking and famous characters, taken from lower grades of life, Fielding lavishes his glorious humour and his rich vitality of creative power too much on forms that are not large types of mankind, but eccentric individuals growing out of a special period in manners, which, nevertheless, they are too exceptional to characterise. And when, but a few years afterwards, we look round to see the likeness of these images, we cannot discover them. Thus, regarded in itself, what a creation of humorous phantasy is Parson Adams! But probably, not even in that day, nor in any day, was Parson Adams a fair type of the English country clergyman; and if it were so, it would still not be one of those types of a class which remain unalterable in its main essentials. No human being that reminds us of Parson Adams could we now discover. In a lesser degree the same remark may be applied to Squire Western, and even to Partridge. This fault in Fielding's more broadly humorous characters, if a fault (as, with profound reverence to that magnificent writer, I conceive it to be), is, at all events, not committed by Scott. Though many of his more broadly humorous characters have the disadvantage, for cosmopolitan acceptation, of expressing themselves in a Scotch dialect, only partially known to the English, and scarcely

Digitized by Google

possible to translate into a foreign language without loss to their subtler traits of personality, still they suggest parallels and likenesses among human beings in whatever society we are thrown. As long as the world lives there will be Major Dalgetties and Andrew Fairservices. I am here opposing characters in either novelist which may be said to exemplify knowledge of the world; where another knowledge is required — a knowledge more appertaining to metaphysical philosophy, and requiring a depth of reflection which Scott very seldom exhibits — Fielding achieves characters which Scott could not have analysed with the same skill; and in those characters Fielding creates types of generalities that are never obsolete. Witness the masterly exposition of cant in Blifil — witness the playful but profound satire on scholastic disputations in the bold sketches of Thwackum and Square — witness also that sublime irony upon false greatness which, in 'Jonathan Wild,' exemplifies the most refined reasonings through the rudest parables, and in the wild poetry of its burlesque approaches the dignity of the heroic which it mocks. In 'Jonathan Wild,' Fielding is Fielding *plus* Lucian and Swift, and rivalling at times even the point and polish of Voltaire.

There was, however, this difference between Scott and Fielding in their treatment even of humorous character: Fielding, where greatest — as in Blifil, Thwackum, Square, Jonathan Wild — is satirical. He debases, to a certain degree, high conceptions of humanity, in pulling down the false pretences of impostors. Decorum itself, that necessary accompaniment to social virtue, does not quite escape the contempt

Digitized by Google

with which we regard Blifil as its spurious representative. The laugh at Thwackum and Square leaves a certain ridicule on the highest inquiries of intellectual philosophy; and, however happily false heroism may be burlesqued and bantered in 'Jonathan Wild,' still the aspirations of youth would fall to a level injurious to the grandeur of the people from which that youth sprang, if the boy could regard as the true parallels to thieves and pickpockets a Julius Cæsar or an Alexander the Great. But Scott, like Shakespeare, deals very sparingly in satire; in his employment of humour he never debases any of those ideals, the reverence for which improves or exalts society. If his humorous characters examined alone provoke a smile at their cowardice or selfishness, beside them there always soar great images of valour and generosity. And in this distinction I think he shows both the superior beauty of his poetic art, and the more dispassionate and objective survey of mankind which belongs to his knowledge of the world. Certainly Scott, like Shakespeare and Goethe, had the advantage of living in a very noble age, and in an age which, on the whole, was eminently conciliatory. An age that enabled a writer to regard Napoleon and Wellington as his contemporaries, was one which made heroism familiar to the common talk of the day. But it was also a conciliatory age. Even in the midst of the European war many circumstances tending to soften violent dissensions between honest and thoughtful minds were in operation. There had grown up a spirit of tolerance in religious opinions which was almost wholly new in our modern era; for the tolerance which Voltaire demanded for the propagandists of Deism he certainly denied to the

Digitized by Google

preachers of Christianity. Out of all the crimes and the madness of the latter days of the French Revolution there had arisen, almost unconsciously, a greater respect for humanity — a deeper conviction of that consideration and tenderness which Governments owe to the masses they govern; and, on the other hand, the attempt to erase from modern societies the veneration due to their own ancient foundations, and substitute instead (for men the most innovating never can get rid of the homage due to antiquity of some kind) a spurious, ignorant, superstitious worship of old heathen republics, had awakened a desire to revive and recur to the genuine antiquity of our own northern Christian races. The first idea of this revival was caught by Chauteaubriand in his 'Génie du Christianisme' — a work which, despite a thousand faults of sentimental exaggeration and inflated style, seized hold on the age, because it fulfilled a want of the age, and had, at its first publication, directly — has now, when few read the work, indirectly — an immense effect on the sentiment of Europe. Endowed with a higher poetic genius adopting a form infinitely more popular, and guided by a taste far more masculine than Chateaubriand's, Scott rose to unite the reverence to what is best in our own genuine antiquity with what is best in our own genuine modern modes of thought. And this is really the chief merit of his affluent genius, and the main cause of his ascendant popularity throughout Europe; — that he was at once conservative and liberal in the noblest sense of either hackneyed word. Conservative in his conception and portraiture of those great elements of the Christian Past which each Christian community of Europe has employed in its progressive development;

Digitized by Google

liberal in the respect he shows to all that can advance our human destinies throughout the future — to valour, to honour, to conscience. Though his intellect did not lead him to philosophise, his grand all-comprehending human heart achieved the large results of philosophy. Here is his advantage over Byron, who had, in remarkable degree, the temperament which leads men to philosophise, but wanted the discipline of intellect which is necessary for the attainment of philosophy. But great poets never philosophise in vain; and even in philosophy Lord Byron achieved a purpose not designed by himself. With many defects of hasty, and even slovenly composition, and with notions of criticism as loose and inaccurate as were all his notions of abstract reasoning, Lord Byron expressed a something, in form more charming, despite its faults, than the world had yet known, which the world had long wanted to hear expressed, and for which, at that especial day, the world desired an utterance. For if there be a truth in the world everlastingly general, and therefore eternally poetical, it is the absolute futility and hollowness of earthly objects and sensual pleasures, — in fact, that this world is a grand thing if held in reference to another, and a miserable thing if not. Byron's poetry is the expression of that truth more palpably, more to the conception of ordinary readers, than it had been hitherto expressed, except by the Preacher. And such is human nature, that if anything is to be said with effect against the pleasures of the world, we must have it said by some one who could command them. We laugh when we read an anecdote of a French poet who, at the age of sixty, calls on the ladies of his acquaintance to tell them that he has renounced his worship to the

Digitized by Google

goddess of Love: We should not laugh at, but rather feel an interest in the young poet — probably not half so good a poet as the old one — who declared that he abjured the same goddess at the age of twenty-eight. When Molière produced his 'Misanthrope,' it was supposed that he designed to portray himself as Alceste. The play was not, at first, successful. What more natural than that a poor player should be a misanthrope? But a rumour spread that Alceste was meant for a great duke, and then the popular interest was excited. What more extraordinary than that a great duke should be a misanthrope? So with Byron's verse. A truth profound, and, in itself, intensely religious, was flung forth without religious sentiment — nay, rather in daring scepticism — by a man who possessed all which the world adulates, and who mourned or mocked its nothingness; — the young noble, of lofty birth, and of a beauty so rare that only two types of masculine beauty, which painters display, can match it — viz., those of Napoleon and Raffaelle! Here was a picture which brought out with striking force the moral, imbedded in the midst of poetry, perhaps more striking to a thoughtful mind because it was not enforced by an austere preacher, but came as a wail from the lips of a sceptic. What Goethe has said of Byron I believe to be true — viz., "He was essentially a born poet." He had very little art, very little of the ordinary knowledge which is essential to most writers, whether in prose or verse. One has but to read his Letter in defence of Pope against Bowles, to perceive that he had never learned the elementary laws of criticism. His book-learning was not only inferior to that of Dryden, or even of Pope, but to that of any modern

Digitized by Google

writer of mark in any country, with the solitary exception of Burns. And even when we speak of him as a born poet, we must allow that his earliest poems do not equal in merit Pope's imitation of Horace at the age of fourteen. But poetry is not like music. In music a great composer shows what is in him while he is a child — in poetry the born poet may long linger before he chances on his rightful utterance. Byron did not linger long — he chanced on an utterance that enthralled Europe before he was twenty-seven. Of all our great poets since Milton, Byron and Scott are at once the most recognised by foreign nations, and yet owe the least to foreign poets. They owed nothing to the French, yet of all our poets they are those whom the French most condescend to imitate. If the French now study Shakespeare, it is because Scott and Byron allured them to study English.

The extent to which I have already taxed, in this Essay, the patience of readers the gentlest — if, indeed that patience has not long since refused to pay the impost — will not permit me the mention of some modern writers whose claims to knowledge of the world, as shown in their pages, ought not to be ignored. But the title of my Essay implies selection, and selection must be always arbitrary. Not having room for all, I must be contented with representative examples. I regret even more than the omission of some modern writers, that I cannot widen the scope of my criticism by adequate reference to the ancient — viz., the Latin and Greek. But even the fragments left to us of Publius Syrus, who is said to have been the special delight of Julius Cæsar, the most consummate man of the world who ever lived, would justify a critical essay as

Digitized by Google

lengthened as this. Those fragments consist but in apothegms, many of which, ascribed to Syrus, are probably attributable to others; yet the very imputation to him of sayings so exquisite, attests his rank as the sayer of exquisite things. And the sentences thus collectively fathered upon him, evince a solidity and a splendour of intellect surpassing all which we can discover in Terence and Plautus, and proving, not so much the amazing combination of wit and sagacity in the writer — since we are not sure that they all belong to the writer assigned — as the amazing civilisation of the age out of which they grew, whosoever the writer might be. And it is these fragments, so little familiar to even the learned, that Sydney Smith, telling us how the 'Edinburgh Review' came to be started, says, "We took our present grave motto from Publius Syrus, of whom none of us, I am sure, had ever read a single line;" — it is these fragments which, when I am treating of the knowledge of the world, bring before me the obligations in that science, and in the literature familiarising it, which we at this day owe to the Greek and Latin authors. Is there one of their merits which more serves to keep them everlastingly in vogue, and more emphatically distinguishes their genius from that of other antique races, whether Oriental or Northern, than the tone and air of highly civilised European gentlemen in a highly civilised European world?

The secret of what is called classic taste consists in the harmonious combination of manliness of sentiment with elegance of form. If I could sum up the general spirit of ancient literature by one brief definition, I should say that it was the expression of a nature highly

Digitized by Google

poetical, highly imaginative, chastened by a commune with men of admirable common sense, accustomed to the strictness of scholastic reasoning, and ripened by intercourse with the living world. In societies not characterised by the collisions and checks of a highly accomplished society fastidiously alive to vulgarity of language and to bombast in sentiment, the fancy even of genius, the reason even of pure intellect, is apt to run riot. Both the one and the other will tend to forsake what we call the Practical, and, in forsaking it, to depart from the true Ideal; for the true Ideal is the noble chivalrous lover of the Practical — loth to quarrel with its earthly partner, ever seeking not to divorce, but to raise to its own rank that less high-born bride, to which, for better or for worse, it is necessarily allied.

Now, when we speak, in our formal schools, of classic taste, and solemnly commend to our youthful listeners a study of the classic authors, we cannot, unless we are the most servile of pedants, mean to imply any other check upon the divine freedom and play of imagination, so bold in the classic poets, than that which, even in the Homeric dawn of classical literature, the knowledge of man in his highest state of intellectual refinement at the time in which the Poet lived, imposed on his phantasies. If Homer created, as Herodotus implies he did, the gods whom Greece worshipped, and who have long since perished, he also represented, in more unalterable types, the men whom we still behold. But what, I apprehend, we mean to inculcate on our pupils in commending to them the study of the classics, is that soundness of taste and judgment which is formed by intercourse, not with one

Digitized by Google

single writer or another, but with a literature extending over many centuries, and on the whole representing that harmonious union of imagination and reasoning which forms the predominant characteristic of ancient classical literature. In this union Shakespeare, indeed, is more classic than the classics to whom his romance is said by Formalists to be opposed. But in style or form there is a necessity for a common standard of taste, which it is the privilege of dead languages to bestow. Howsoever we English admire Shakespeare, we should hesitate before we commended his form and style as a model. In truth, we should dislike or rebuke the writer who presumed to imitate the form of Shakespeare. We should cry "off" to the mimics who aped his walk. A language dead, and therefore eternally settled, has alone the prerogative of suggesting to all living races ideals of form which are cosmopolitan, not national — which can be tamely copied by none, yet afford standards of taste to all.

Now, while the classic poets authorise the highest flights to which healthful imagination can soar — while they throw open the gates of the supernatural, admitting familiar companionship with deities and nymphs and fauns and satyrs — enlarging the realm of fable to boundaries as remote from this world of fact as the wildest romance can desire — they still, regarded as a class, a general body, preserve sufficient affinities with human nature to secure what may be called the truthfulness of art to the inventions of their fancy. They rarely forsake the Practical, as Goethe understood the word, when he applies it to the genius of the ever-idealising Schiller — meaning thereby the strong sense which *practicalises* the ideal to the common sympa-

Digitized by Google

thies and comprehension of multitudes: while the classic prose-writers — though the severest of them, as historians or philosophers, sometimes desert reason for fancy with a licence we should be sorry nowadays to concede to guides in philosophy and authorities in history — still embody a mass of solid truths, social and moral, which makes them perennially modern in what we call knowledge of the world.

Classic literature, in short, is so essentially characterised by that liberal suavity which Cicero terms "urbanitas," in contradistinction to whatever is narrow-minded, rude, underbred, superfine, and provincial — so thoroughly the literature of gentlemen in whatsoever phase of society or period of time the stem of humanity can put forth the flower of gentleman — that the most polished communities of Europe to this day concur in the superstitious belief that there is something wanting in the tone, spirit, breeding, by which gentlemen are distinguished, in the man who, whatever his birth or his talents, is utterly ignorant of the classics.

In public life, especially, such ignorance appears to make itself felt. An orator in whom it exists rarely fails to say something that jars on the taste or alienates the sympathy of an audience in which gentlemen form the majority. The audience do not detect why — do not pedantically exclaim, "This orator knows nothing of Greek and Latin!" they rather mutter, "This orator does not know gentlemen;" or, "He has mixed very little with the great world."

Cicero finely observes, "*Inter hanc vitam perpolitam humanitate, nihil tam interest quam jus atque vis.*" And it is *jus atque vis* which seem, as a whole, to form

Digitized by Google

the style by which classic literature expresses — *vitam perpolitam.*

Probably knowledge of the world in its widest and healthiest development, is not often exhibited by writers in states of society in which there do not exist at once a tolerant freedom of opinion, if not of institutions — as the former freedom, at least, existed in France even under the old regime — and the polished language which that opinion acquires from the converse of a class raised above the mercantile business of life.

Free institutions necessarily tend to the wider range and securer privilege of free opinions. The Greek eupatrid or the Roman patrician, who had to court the votes of his phyle, or of his clients, could not fail to acquire a large and liberal acquaintanceship, not only with the selfish interests, but with the nobler motive-springs of impassioned multitudes, such as is shown in Thucydides or Cicero: and as all knowledge becomes, as it were, atmospheric, and once admitted into the common air of a place, is generally inhaled; so even poets, aloof from the arena of politicians, caught that generous influence from the very breath they drew in, and express it in their pages. But still the tone of a society refined by aristocratic distinctions, is apparent in the elegance with which the classic writers utter the sentiments popular with the crowd.

But if, in forms of government which exclude free political institutions, though admitting great latitude of literary speech, knowledge of the world is apt to become too narrowed to that of a privileged circle, so, on the other hand, in forms of government so popular as to exclude admitted differences of rank, I know

Digitized by Google

of no writers in whom knowledge of the world is a conspicuous attribute. The United States of America have produced authors remarkable for number and excellence, considering the briefness of period during which the American Republic has existed — remarkable even for national originality, considering the disadvantage of writing in a language appropriated already to enduring masterpieces in the parent State. But while in science and philosophical discussion, in theology, in poetry, and prose fiction, democratic America is rich in works which command just admiration, the main fault of her authorship, and indeed of her statesmanship, in dealing with foreign countries, has been the want of that *comity* — that ineffably urbane wisdom which has its expression in good breeding, and without which knowledge of the world has the air of a clever attorney in sharp practice. The absence of a fixed and permanent order of refined society, with its smile at the bombast and balderdash that captivate the vulgar, seems to lessen the quick perception of genius to the boundaries between good taste and bad; so that, when I read the printed orations of American statesmen, I find a sentence of which a Grattan might have been proud followed by a tawdry 'claptrap of which even a Hunt would have been ashamed. The poets of this grand Anglo-Saxon family, escaping from the popular life, and following the muse in the retirement of their groves or their closets, eliminate from their graceful verse knowledge of the world altogether; they often philosophise on man in the abstract, but they neither depict in their drama nor adorn in their lyrics, nor moralise, in their didactic vein, upon the actual world, which the ideal world surrounds with a purer at-

Digitized by Google

mosphere, but from which it draws up the particles it incorporates in its rays of light, or the vapours it returns in dews. Shakespeare places alike a Miranda and a Stephano in the Enchanted Isle which has Caliban and Ariel for its dwellers; and Horace invokes now a Tyndaris, now a Mæcenas, to the cool of the valley resonant with the pipe of Faunus.

Perhaps, of all American writers, in Washington Irving the polite air of the man of the European world is the most seen; but then, of all American writers, Washington Irving is the one who most sedulously imitated, and most happily caught, the spirit of European writers, formed under aristocratic as well as popular influences; — of all American writers he is thus the least American. In fact, European life — whether among the ancients, as in Athens or Rome, or among the modern civilised races — struggles perpetually for the political ascendancy of the people, but ever also seeks to preserve a superior social influence to a class in which the sense of honour is an ancestral duty — the observance of polished manners a traditional charge. And if ever, in any one of the great nations of Europe, such a class should wholly disappear, that nation will lose its distinctive European character.

Knowledge of the world, in its widest signification, is the knowledge of civilised humanity; and its artistic expression will be consummate in proportion as its range comprehends what is most general in humanity, and its tone represents what is most refined in civilised manners. By knowledge of the world we mean something more than knowledge of a class, whether the class comprise the idlers of May Fair or the operatives

Digitized by Google

of Manchester. But in the mind of a great artist selecting either May Fair or Manchester for his scene and his characters, there is no demagogue's hatred of idlers, and no coxcomb's contempt of workmen. Both classes represent sections of humanity which go back to the earliest date of human records, and may possibly endure to their last.

I started with saying that knowledge of the world, where the world's condition is not unhealthful, though it may be below the average morality of sages, and must comprehend a survey of error, vice, crime, as well as of truth, virtue, innocence, does not necessarily vitiate the student of it, any more than the study of the human frame vitiates the pathologist. Only where the society to which the range of the observer is confined is thoroughly corrupt would it, almost of necessity, infect the moral health of its philosophical student, whether by acquiescence in its example, as may be the case with natures too yielding and soft, or by scorn and wrath at the example, as would be the case with natures too irascible and severe. For, as I have before said, however justly provoked scorn and wrath may be, no mind can be habitually in a state of scorn and wrath without some deterioration of the qualities essential to virtue. "*Ira, pessimus consultor.*" It would be difficult to reconcile any notions or theories of human goodness with creeds from which indulgence, charity, tolerance, philanthropy are excluded as unworthy compromises with human evil.

Now, our world at this epoch, though I do not desire to flatter, is certainly not one which would justify Thales in bidding farewell to it. If we consult history in an unprejudiced, unsuperstitious spirit, I do not think

Digitized by Google

we shall find that the world, regarded as a whole, has ever been much better than it is now, and in many important respects it has been much worse. I speak more especially of the world in my own country, which at this moment is certainly a more humane, peaceable, orderly, moral, decorous, yet good-natured world, than it ever seems to have been, from the date of the last George up to that of the first William. If I look back to the chronicles of the eighteenth century — nay, if I look back only so far as the year in which I left college — I am startled at the visible improvement. I do not say that those rare individuals who stand forth as the landmarks of time were not possibly much greater, and, considering the temptations that begirt them, much better than individuals nowadays. I honour the reverence to noble tombs too implicitly to believe that any living great man can equal a dead great man. A dead great man is a shrined ideal of excellence; a living great man is a struggling fellow-mortal. The one is Hercules assoiled from mortal stain when separated from mortal labour, who has ascended from the fire-pile to the Nectar Hall of Olympus; but the other is the Hercules who, if at one time he is valiantly slaying the Hydra and calmly braving the very Powers of Orcus, is seen at another time the effeminate slave of Omphale, or the frenzied murderer of Iphitus. But the progress of society has very fallacious milestones in the monuments we erect to apotheosised individuals. Whatever my admiration for Alexander — and, in spite of Mr. Grote, it is intense — Alexander's march through Asia affords me no gleam of intelligence as to the advance of his Macedonian people in the theories of political government or ethical doctrine.

Digitized by Google

What I see in England, comparing this century with the last — or comparing even the date in which I now write with the date in which I wrote first — is the advancement of numbers, the more general culture of intellect, the milder constructions of law, the greater tenderness to suffering and erring humanity, the more decent respect to domestic sanctities, the more intellectual — not unreasoning — acquiescence in religious truths. — And, therefore, looking at the world as reflected in the microcosm of my own country, — through all gradations of society, from the palace to the cottage — and through all sections of opinion, from that of the pulpit to that of a club, — it seems to me that a writer of our day and land, aspiring to fame for knowledge of the world, would view that world not with the abhorrence of Juvenal, not with the despair of venerable Bede, but with as indulgent a charity as that which makes Shakespeare and Goethe so lovably mild and so genially wise. Still, the world is the world, and it is not Utopia. Even in our own England, no doubt, there is much that is very bad, and we varnish it over by what in vernacular vulgarism is called "cant;" while out of England there are many things which revolt our English preconceived opinions.

There is therefore quite enough material left for either Muse, the tragic or the comic — quite enough left for the grave reproof of philosophy, or the light ridicule of satire. But the writer in either of these developments of his natural genius who shall seek to win general and permanent repute for his knowledge of the world we live in, will find that the same greater mildness of manners which would render us shocked at the judgments our courts of law passed on offenders

Digitized by Google

a century ago, would also indispose us to allow to writers the truculent sentences upon human error which then were considered the just denunciations of outraged virtue.

Whether the world be better, as I believe, or worse, as some fond worshippers of the past maintain, it is quite clear that the world does not nowadays think it can be improved by the old-fashioned modes of hanging and branding and pillorying, or of scoffing and scolding and snubbing, which it so cheerfully accepted as salutary mortifications from the hands and tongues of our ancestors.

And in the writer to whom we accord knowledge of the world in this our day of it, we shall expect to find that large toleration which has grown out of a wisdom more lenient, and that well-bred urbanity of tone which succeeds to the boorishness of vituperation, in proportion as the refinement of intellectual and social culture has become more diffused throughout the various ranks of the public.

Digitized by Google

ESSAY XXVI.

READERS AND WRITERS.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

READERS AND WRITERS.

READING without purpose is sauntering, not exercise. More is got from one book on which the thought settles for a definite end in knowledge, than from libraries skimmed over by a wandering eye. A cottage flower gives honey to the bee, a king's garden none to the butterfly.

Youths who are destined for active careers, or ambitious of distinction in such forms of literature as require freshness of invention or originality of thought, should avoid the habit of intense study for many hours at a stretch. There is a point in all tension of the intellect beyond which effort is only waste of strength. Fresh ideas do not readily spring up within a weary brain; and whatever exhausts the mind not only enfeebles its power, but narrows its scope. We often see men who have over-read at college, entering upon life as languidly as if they were about to leave it. They have not the vigour to cope with their own generation; for their own generation is young, and they have wasted the nervous energy which supplies the sinews of war to youth in its contests for fame or fortune.

Study with regularity, at settled hours. Those in the forenoon are the best, if they can be secured. The man who has acquired the habit of study, though for only one hour every day in the year, and keeps to the

Digitized by Google

one thing studied till it is mastered, will be startled to see the way he has made at the end of a twelvemonth.

He is seldom over-worked who can contrive to be in advance of his work. If you have three weeks before you to learn something which a man of average quickness could learn in a week, learn it the first week, and not the third. Business despatched is business well done, but business hurried is business ill done.

In learning what others have thought, it is well to keep in practice the power to think for one's self: when an author has added to your knowledge, pause and consider if you can add nothing to his.

Be not contented to have learned a problem by heart; try and deduce from it a corollary not in the book.

Spare no pains in collecting details before you generalise; but it is only when details are generalised that a truth is grasped. The tendency to generalise is universal with all men who achieve great success, whether in art, literature, or action. The habit of generalising, though at first gained with care and caution, secures, by practice, a comprehensiveness of judgment, and a promptitude of decision, which seem to the crowd like the intuitions of genius. And, indeed, nothing more distinguishes the man of genius from the mere man of talent, than the facility of generalising the various details, each of which demands the aptitude of a special talent; but all of which can be only gathered into a single whole by the grasp of a mind which may have no special aptitude for any.

Digitized by Google

Invention implies the power of generalisation, for an invention is but the combining of many details known before, into a new whole, and for new results.

Upon any given point, contradictory evidence seldom puzzles the man who has mastered the laws of evidence; but he knows little of the laws of evidence who has not studied the unwritten law of the human heart. And without this last knowledge a man of action will not attain to the practical, nor will a poet achieve the ideal.

He who has no sympathy never knows the human heart; but the obtrusive parade of sympathy is incompatible with dignity of character in a man, or with dignity of style in a writer. Of all the virtues necessary to the completion of the perfect man, there is none to be more delicately implied and less ostentatiously vaunted than that of exquisite feeling or universal benevolence.

In science, address the few; in literature, the many. In science, the few must dictate opinion to the many; in literature, the many, sooner or later, force their judgment on the few. But the few and the many are not necessarily the few and the many of the passing time: for discoverers in science have not unoften, in their own day, had the few against them; and writers the most permanently popular not unfrequently found, in their own day, a frigid reception from the many. By the few, I mean those who must ever remain the few, from whose dicta we, the multitude, take fame upon trust; by the many, I mean those who constitute the multitude in the long-run. We take the fame of a Harvey or a Newton upon trust, from the verdict of the few in successive generations;

Digitized by Google

but the few could never persuade us to take poets and novelists on trust. We, the many, judge for ourselves of Shakespeare and Cervantes.

He who addresses the abstract reason, addresses an audience that must for ever be limited to the few; he who addresses the passions, the feelings, the humours, which we all have in common, addresses an audience that must for ever compose the many. But either writer, in proportion to his ultimate renown, embodies some new truth, and new truths require new generations for cordial welcome. This much I would say meanwhile, Doubt the permanent fame of any work of science which makes immediate reputation with the ignorant multitude; doubt the permanent fame of any work of imagination which is at once applauded by a conventional clique that styles itself "the critical few."

Digitized by Google

ESSAY XXVII.

ON THE SPIRIT OF CONSERVATISM.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

ON THE SPIRIT OF CONSERVATISM.

In every political state which admits of the free expression of opinion, it is a trite commonplace to say that there will always be two main divisions of political reasoners — viz., a class predisposed to innovate; a class predisposed to conserve. But there will be also two other divisions of reasoners, sometimes blended with, often distinct from, those that have just been defined — viz., a class predisposed to all theories that strengthen the power of the body governed; and a class predisposed to all doctrines that confirm the authority of the body governing. Prevalent with the one is a passion for political liberty, which, when carried to extreme, is fanatical; prevalent with the other is a reverence for civil order, which, when carried to extreme, is superstitious. It does not necessarily happen that the class most predisposed to conserve is identical with the class most inclined to confirm the sway of the governing body; nor that the class most predisposed to innovate should be that most inclined to strengthen the body governed. There are times when political liberty is clearly with the conservative side, and its loss is insured by the triumph of the innovating. Cæsar was an innovator, Brutus a conservative. But the cause of freedom was certainly with Brutus, and not with Cæsar. In democratic republics, we may, indeed, fairly assume

Digitized by Google

that the liberties their institutions comprise are opposed to innovation. Thus, the American constitution presents a check to all tamperings with its main principles, which no existent constitutional monarchy has secured. The constitution of the United States cannot be legally altered by the votes of a mere majority. Such alteration requires the votes of two-thirds of the Assembly. So, more or less, in every community where a considerable degree of political freedom is possessed by the people, experiments which seem to involve any hazards to the duration of the liberties existing, though proffered as extensions and accelerants of their action, may be regarded, by the most devoted friends of a people's freedom, with the same disfavour with which the trustee for the enjoyers of a solid estate would listen to proposals to hazard punctual rents and solid acres for shares in a company which offers 20 per cent and the chances of bankruptcy.

It is with liberty as with all else worth having in life. The first thing is to get it, the next thing is to keep it, the third thing is to increase what we have. But if we are not without common prudence, our wariness in speculation is in proportion to the amount of the property we already possess. In desperate circumstances it is worth hazarding a shilling to gain a plum. In affluence it is not worth hazarding a plum to gain a shilling.

"Nothing venture, nothing have," says, not unwisely, the young dare-devil who can scarcely be worse off than he is. "Venture all and have nothing," says, at least as wisely, the middle-aged millionaire, besieged by ingenious projectors, who, proving to his complete satisfaction that English

Digitized by Google

funds yield but a small interest, invite him to exchange his stock in consols for shares in the wonderful diamond-mines just discovered in the Mountains of the Moon.

Why do English funds yield us but $3^1/_2$ per cent, when we can get twice as much in the Spanish, and almost thrice as much in the Turkish? Simply because though the interest is smaller, the capital is more secure.

The capital of English freedom is the accumulation of centuries; and the interest derived from it, as compared with that of younger free states, is to be computed at the difference between the rent of soil lately wrung from the wilderness, and that which is paid for the building-ground of cities.

I am, and, as long as I live, I believe I shall be, a passionate lover of freedom. Individually, freedom is the vital necessity of my being. I cannot endure to cripple my personal freedom for anything less than my obligation to duty. What I, as man, thus prize for myself, I assume that each community of men should no less ardently prize.

Now, a man will develop his uses, and tend towards the nearest approach to the perfectibility of his being, in proportion as freedom and duty so harmonise in his motives and actions, that, in his ordinary course of life, he can scarcely distinguish one from the other. If I desire and will to do that which I ought to do, and desire and will not to do that which I ought not to do, my freedom and my duty are practically one — my restraints are in reality

Digitized by Google

the essential properties of my own nature. If, for instance, the principle of honour has became part and parcel of my mind, I cannot pick pockets — the law against picking pockets is no restraint on me. If the law permitted me to do so, I still should not and could not pick a pocket.

As it is with a man, so it is with a state — that state will be the best in which liberty and order so, as it were, fuse into each other, that the conditions prescribed by order are not felt as restraints on liberty.

And as with a man, so with a state; the amalgamation of freedom and duty is the unconscious result of habit — the custom of liberty incorporates with its motives and actions the custom of order.

Any violent or sudden change in the conditions of this marriage-bond between freedom and duty must inflict a shock on their union. If the habitual use of my freedom in certain directions has always led me to a definite course of duties, you cannot abruptly alter those duties but what you must impair my freedom.

Thus where the mind of a nation has been so formed by its institutions that all the restraints imposed by law are made by custom consentaneous to the normal operations of liberty, you cannot raise up new institutions, enforcing restraints to which liberty is unfamiliar, but what you sow the seeds of a quarrel between liberty and order.

Hence even a mere change of dynasty, though in itself it may be the best for liberty and order in a later generation, will often sever liberty from order for the generation on which it is brought to bear.

Digitized by Google

The introduction of the Guelphs to the exclusion of the Stuarts was no doubt a fortunate event for the ultimate destinies of the British nation. But, for the then living race, it shocked the liberty of those who honoured the old line, and imperilled order to those who preferred the new.

Although the laws went on the same under George the Guelph as under Anne the Stuart — although scarcely one in ten thousand of those whom the change disaffected could have been worse off or better off for the name of the king on the throne — still what was loyalty to one part of the people seemed treason to the other part. The result was rebellion in those who conceived that their liberty of choice in the election of their sovereign was aggrieved; and, so far as we can judge, that rebellion would have been successful if Charles Edward had marched upon London instead of retreating from Derby. Had the rebellion been successful, those over whom it triumphed would have thought their liberty aggrieved. Time is the only reconciler — that is, change ceases to interrupt the union of liberty and order when it ceases to be felt as change, and when custom has again brought about the union which the infringement of custom had severed.

But where, instead of a dynasty, it is a change of institutions, affecting all the habitual relationships between duty and freedom in the minds of citizens, the danger, if less violent, is likely to prove more mortal to the wellbeing of the community. Freedom, and all its noblest consequences in the development of

Digitized by Google

intellectual riches, may, we will say for the sake of argument, be equally operative under a constitutional monarchy or a well-educated democracy. But if all the habits of political thought and motive have been formed under the one, they could not be transferred to the other without that revolution of the entire system which no organised body can long survive. If I were an American, I should regard as the worst affliction that could befall my country the substitution for democracy, with all its faults, of a constitutional monarchy, with all its merits; because my countrymen would have been accustomed to associate their elementary ideas of liberty with republican institutions: So, being an Englishman, I should regard it as the worst affliction that could befall my countrymen, to substitute for constitutional monarchy a democratic republic; because all their habits of mind are formed on the notion that liberty, on the whole, is safer, and the dignity of life is higher, where the institutions essential to the duration of constitutional monarchy make the representatives of the public interests other than the paid servants of a class that must of necessity be the least educated and the most excitable.

The favourite reproach to a conservative policy is, that it is not in favour of progress. But there is nothing in a conservative policy antagonistic to progress: on the contrary, resistance to progress is destructive to conservatism.

Political conservatism can but seek the health and longevity of the political body it desires to conserve. To a state, progress is as essential as exercise is to a

Digitized by Google

man. But a state has this advantage over a man, that while it is in robust health its mere exercise must, of necessity, be progress. If Science is always experimenting, if Art is always inventing, if Commerce is always exchanging, if looms are always at work, the state cannot fail to make progress; whereas I, as individual man, cannot say that my habitual walk is always in the direction of a journey towards objects yet unreached, or my habitual occupation in my study necessarily conducive to the discovery of a new truth.

A nation's habitual employment, while the nation is in health, is, then, of necessity reproductive; a man's is not.

Therefore a true conservative policy is for a nation the policy of progress, because without exercise the body politic would languish and die; and with exercise it must, if in health, augment the resources which furnish strength against external enemies, and, by widening the markets of labour, interest a wider range of citizens in the maintenance of domestic order.

But progress does not mean transformation; it means the advance towards the fullest development of forces of which any given human organisation, whether it be a man's or a society's, is capable. What is progress in one state may be paralysis to another. Each state is an integral unity; it has, when free, not otherwise — as man, when free, not otherwise — the powers within itself to improve all the faculties which it takes from birth. It cannot, any more than a man can do, alter its whole idiosyncrasies into those of another organised unity which you present to it as a model.

Digitized by Google

Suppose you had said to Shakespeare, "Friend, you have considerable talents; do not throw them away on the contemptible occupation of a play-writer. Be a philosopher. Look at your contemporary Bacon: how much higher is his fame and his station than yours! You are ambitious of progress — be a Bacon!"

If Shakespeare had listened to your advice he would not have been a Shakespeare, and it is my belief that he would not have been a Bacon. If, on the other hand, you had said to Bacon, "Friend, you have very great genius, especially in the study of nature. But see how all schools of philosophy perish. You are destroying the authority of Aristotle, to be destroyed yourself by some other bold guesser hereafter. Poets alone are sure of immortality; they are the truest diviners of nature. You put down Aristotle, but who can put down Horace? He who writes prose builds his temple to Fame in rubble; he who writes verse builds it in granite. Write poems — poetry is clearly a progress from prose. Write a tragedy out of one of those novels on your table, 'Romeo and Juliet,' or 'Othello.'"

Had Bacon taken your advice, he would not have been a Bacon: my belief is that he would never have been a Shakespeare. It is the same with states; the more highly they are gifted in one development of faculties, the less it would be progress to turn aside to another. Each leading state in civilised Europe has its idiosyncrasies; its real progress is in developing those idiosyncrasies; its real annihilation of its own highest attributes would be to exchange its own for the idiosyncrasies of another state.

Digitized by Google

Conservatism, rightly considered, is the policy which conserves the body politic in the highest condition of health of which it is capable, compatible with longevity. I make that reserve, because a man who has passed the elastic season of youth may attain to a higher condition of muscular strength by putting himself under a trainer, or scaling the Swiss mountains; but in so doing he may sow the germs of some malady which will shorten his life.

Conservatism accepts cheerfully the maxim of Bentham, "the greatest happiness of the greatest number," provided it may add this indispensable condition, "for the longest period of time." The greatest happiness of the greatest number may consist, for the moment, in the greatest number having their own way in something which will be their greatest misery in the long-run. The greatest number in the reign of King James the First thought it was especial happiness to put to death the old women whom they believed to be witches. The greatest happiness of the greatest number on board a ship may be, for the moment, to get at the rum-barrels, and shoot down the captain who stands in their way. But it is not for the greatest happiness of any population, in the long-run, to admit sanguinary superstitions into their criminal code, nor for the greatest happiness of a crew, in the long-run, to get drunk and to murder their captain.

Duration is an essential element of all plans for happiness, private or public; and conservatism looks to the durable in all its ideas of improvement.

But duration means the duration of a something definite in politics; that something is the body politic

Digitized by Google

— the Nation. A conservative party must be national, or it is nothing.

Now, in politics there are two grand theories, each antagonistic to all principles mean and selfish. The one theory is Philanthropy, the other Patriotism — a care for the whole human race, or a care for the whole community to which we belong. The tendency of the more popular party will be towards the first, the tendency of the less popular party towards the last. In the popular sentiment of masses, the cause of fellow men creates more enthusiasm than the interests of fellow-countrymen. Oligarchies, on the other hand, have small regard for mankind in the concrete, but are capable of great enthusiasm for a state. It is difficult to conceive more passionate devotion for a state than was shown by the oligarchies of Sparta and Venice. In communities which admit to the masses a large share of political power, a conservative statesman must consult that sentiment of universal philanthropy which in itself is noble — but not at the hazard of the state, which must be his first care. Masses could easily be led to a war against some absolute sovereign oppressing his subjects — oligarchies in alliance with the sovereign might assist him to oppress his subjects. The conservative statesman of a free country remains neutral. It is not for the good of his country to lavish blood and treasure on the internal quarrels of other countries. By here consulting Patriotism, he in truth advances Philanthropy, for it is to the benefiet of all nations that each nation should settle its own quarrels for itself.

Patriotism is a safer principle, both for a state and the human race, than Philanthropy. Sancho Panza

Digitized by Google

administering his island is a better model than Don Quixote sallying forth to right the wrongs of the universe.

Philanthropy, like glory, is a circle in the water,

> "Which never ceaseth to enlarge itself,
> Till by broad spreading it disperse to nought."

But an enlightened love of country comprehends the objects of Philanthropy, without making Philanthropy its avowed object. That is to say, a man who has an enlightened love for his country will seek to identify its interests with a just and humane policy — with scrupulous faith in the fulfilment of engagements — with a respect, as inviolably preserved toward weak as toward strong powers — not only of the law, but of the comity, of nations; and thus, in a word, he will strive to render the wellbeing of the state to which he belongs conducive to the catholic and enduring interests of the varied communities of mankind. But just as an individual would become an intolerable plague to his neighbours if he were always interfering with their domestic affairs, though with the best intentions; so a weak state would become ridiculous, and a strong state tyrannical, if, under the pretext of general philanthropy, it sought to force its own notions of right or wrong, of liberty or order, upon states not subjected to its sovereignty. As it is only through self-development that any community can mature its own elements of happiness or grandeur, so non-intervention is in truth the policy not more of wisdom than of respect for humanity, without which love for humanity is an intermeddling mischief-maker. Nevertheless, where the internal feuds of any one nation assume a character so formidable as

Digitized by Google

to threaten the peace of other nations, intervention may become the necessity of self-preservation. But the plea of self-preservation should be irrefragably a sound one, and not, as it usually is, an excuse for self-aggrandisement, in profiting by the dissensions which the intermeddler foments for his own crafty ends.

It has been a question frequently discussed of late, and by no means satisfactorily settled, how far non-interference in the domestic feuds of other nations admits of the frank expression of opinion — the freedom of remonstrance — the volunteered suggestion of a policy. But in free communities it would be utterly impossible for a minister to refrain from conveying to a foreign government the public sentiment of his country. The popular chamber would not allow him to be silent where a popular cause seemed at stake. To express opinions — to address remonstrances — are acts in themselves perfectly compatible with friendship, provided the tone be friendly. But for one government to volunteer, in detail, schemes of policy for the adoption of another independent government, is seldom a prudent venture. It is too calculated to wound the dignity of the state advised, not to provoke an answer which wounds the dignity of the state advising. Exceptions may arise, but they should be regarded with great caution. For there is scarcely an exception that does not engender on both sides those resentments of mortified self-esteem which, if they do not suffice to create war at once, render states more disposed to find excuses for war later.

Political freedom is, or ought to be, the best guarantee for the safety and continuance of spiritual, men-

Digitized by Google

tal, and civil freedom. It is the combination of numbers to secure the liberty of each one.

Therefore, as each community is a life in itself, so each community, to be free, should be independent of others.

Every state, to be independent, must contain the elements of a power sufficient, under all existent circumstances, without it and within, to maintain itself.

It may not, if a small and weak state, be able in itself to stand against any one powerful aggressive neighbour; but it may so enlist the interests of all its neighbours, that if one attacks it, all the others will combine to defend it. This is the case of Switzerland. All Europe has this interest in Switzerland — that it would be unsafe for Europe that Switzerland should be engulfed either by Austria or by France. The interest of Europe guarantees the independence of Switzerland.

Alliances tending to check any one state from invading others are the natural precaution of a conservative policy. The choice of such alliances, the conditions to which they pledge us, are questions not of principle, but of expediency; they belong not to all time, but to each time, bringing forth its own mutable causes of apprehension. And here for statesmanship there can be no precise rule, because in time there is no exact precedent.

To sum up: — The true conservative policy in any given state is in self-preservation; and self-preservation does not confine itself to the mere care for existence, but extends to all that can keep the body politic in

Digitized by Google

the highest state of health and vigour: therefore progress and development of forces are essential to self-preservation. But according to a conservative policy, such progress and such development will always be encouraged with a due regard to the idiosyncratic character of a state, such as it has been made by time and circumstance — to the institutions which have not only become endeared to it by custom, but have contributed to consolidate the national unity by forming and systematising the national spirit and mind. A conservative policy in England will favour peace, if only because England is essentially a commercial commonwealth, and its real sinews of strength are in its financial resources. War exposes commerce to hazard, and financial resources to an indefinite drain. It is true that foreign wars, however unpopular, never or rarely produce intestine rebellion; but the financial distress which follows a war the most popular, is the most dangerous cause of revolutions. Nevertheless, a commercial community cannot accept peace at all hazards, because no commerce would be long safe under a flag dishonoured or despised. A conservative policy in England would vigilantly guard our maritime power, and spare no cost necessary to maintain a navy superior to that of any other single European Power; but it would regard with great jealousy any attempt to maintain, in England itself, more than the well-disciplined nucleus and framework of a standing army. It has to conserve political liberty as the most precious of all heirlooms; and a nation once reconciled to the maintenance of large standing armies, submits its liberties to the mercy of accident. A state must, for durability, as I have said, conserve its special national character, and the

Digitized by Google

national character of England will be lost whenever it shall see with apathy large standing armies within its own shores. One of the obvious advantages of military colonies is the facility they afford for maintaining therein such military strength as may be necessary for the protection of the empire, without quartering large bodies of troops in England, to the danger of freedom; and therefore it is a very shallow view of Imperial policy, to ascribe solely to our colonial wants the military forces kept in colonies, and exclaim, "See what those colonies cost us!" If we had no troops in colonies, we must either be without adequate military force, or we must obtain such adequate military force at the risk of freedom, by collecting and converging it into garrisons at home.

Prudence in the administration of finance is the characteristic virtue of a conservative policy; for every form of government in which the expenditure habitually exceeds the income, is doomed to undergo a vital change. The more hopelessly the finances are disordered, the more violent in all probability the change will be. Thus, despotic governments may become democratised, and republican institutions may become monarchical.

Lastly, the statesman who would maintain a conservative policy for England has always to bear in mind that any state which attains to a wealth, an influence, a grandeur disproportioned to its native population, or the extent of its native dominion, owes its rank rather to causes that may be called complicated and artificial than to causes simple and natural. The prosperity and power of France recover with a bound

Digitized by Google

after numerous shocks upon internal order and commercial credit. But a single one of such shocks might suffice to destroy for a century, perhaps for ever, the rank of England among first-rate Powers; and therefore, English statesmen have to consider many political questions, not only on their own abstract merits, but with due regard to their collateral bearings upon the national wellbeing. It is for this reason, perhaps, that in England a truly conservative politician, though without any undue apprehension of revolutionary tendencies among the bulk of the population, would seek to preserve the preponderating electoral power among the middle classes; because with them there is, upon the whole, a larger amount of education and forethought than could be reasonably expected from numbers subsisting upon manual labour. But as free nations are governed either by the preponderance of numbers or by the ascendancy of cultivated intelligence, so a conservative policy, if it do not maintain itself in power by the first, must seek to conciliate and identify itself with the second. It should have no fear of the calm extension of knowledge; its real antagonist is in the passionate force of ignorance. As it seeks to develop in the state whatever is best for the state's preservation in its highest form of integral unity, so certainly it should befriend and foster all the intellectual powers which enrich and adorn a state — seeking, irrespectively of class, to honour and ally itself with all that ennobles the people it guards. It should be the friend of commerce, of art, of science, of letters, and should carefully keep open every vista by which merit can win its way to distinction; for the best mode to aristo-

Digitized by Google

cratise the sentiment of a population is to revere, as the finest element of aristocracy, every merit which, conquering obstacles of birth and fortune, rises up into distinction, and adds a new dignity to the nation itself.

Digitized by Google

L'ENVOI.

HERE ends the series of Essays to which I have given the general name of Caxtoniana; for the subjects of most of them suggested themselves to me while embodying in the form of romance that experience of the world we live in which is expressed in the novels ascribed to Pisistratus Caxton.

And as the subjects thus suggested could find no adequate scope in the orderly treatment of narrative fiction, they have been here followed out in their own wayward tracks of discourse; suggesting in their turn other themes for speculation or criticism, in the old-fashioned field of *belles lettres* to which this mixed kind of Essay belongs.

So, at last, the Caxtoniana have swelled into volumes, now dismissed to their fate. May they find some modest place in the shelves that make room for the fictions to which they trace their origin and owe their name!

Digitized by Google

PRINTING OFFICE OF THE PUBLISHER.

Digitized by Google

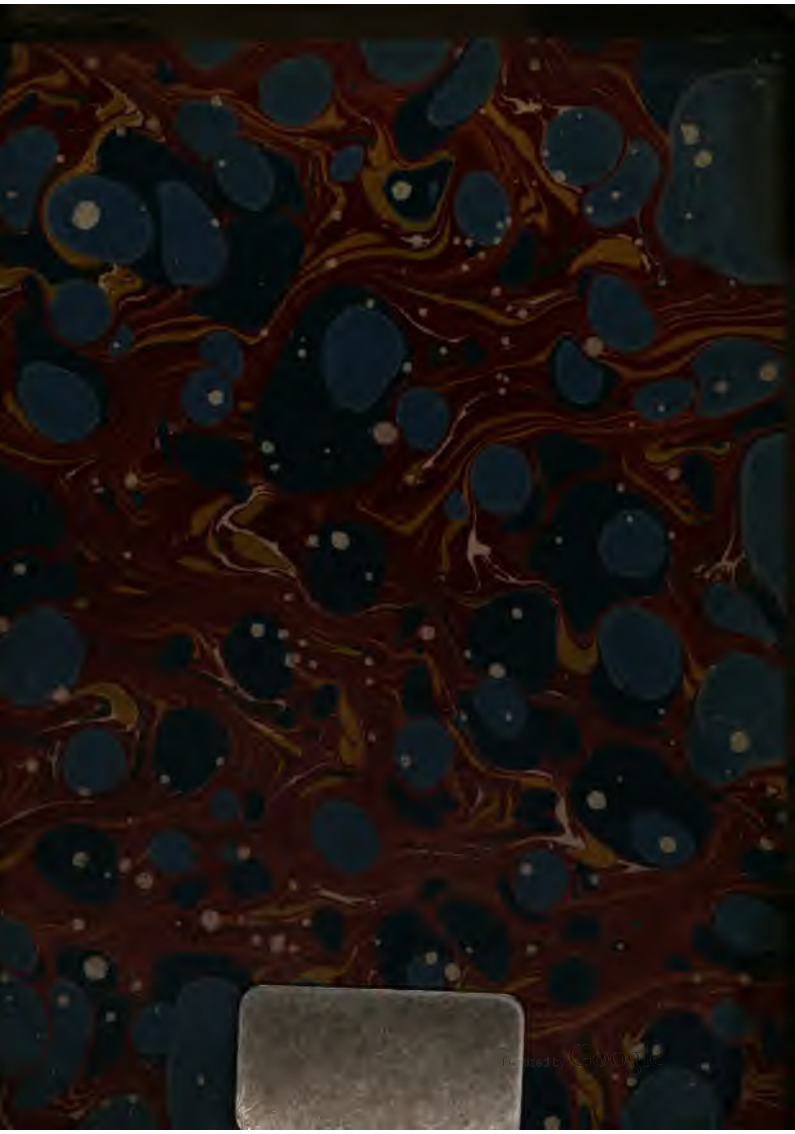
Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google



Digitized by Google